CHAPTER – III
Limpid Potrayal of the Glory of India

This chapter is designed to discuss glory of India of the past and present portrayed in time selected novels V.S. Naipaul of Geeta Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie. The areas where these novelists have uncritically admired everything that’s Indian, presumably out of their patriotic sentiments will be analyzed in this chapter.

India has always been a land drawing awe and reverence, from the writers, intellectuals and scholars from all over the world. English poets from Shakespeare to Southey glorified the country they had never visited. The reality of India what is it, and where is it? This vast and varied country with a rich ancient culture contains myriads of things that can be thought of in a common terms of philosophy. People get perplexed on trying to read the face of India. It keeps sprouting amazing things from its fold. Nothing can keep India within confines. Aruna Chakravarti in her book Ruth Prawer Jhabvala : A Study in Empathy and Exile quotes : India is not me, there are a hundred Indias. (RPJASIEAE 20)

One dominant factor that draw lots of people from all over the world is spirituality. Raja Rao believed that spirituality is the most important trait of Indian mind. However Aldous Huxley felt that spirituality is the main cause of all her misfortunes. Ironically spirituality has its roots in religion that has helped in the development of Indian cultural tradition. The life of rural or urban is governed by theory of Karma. However this kept baffling the people all over the world for ages. The spurt in science and technology and prosperity in countries like
America led to acquire all the material gains. But things and property could not purchase peace. Instead it led them to nerve splitting condition. They were compelled to look for refuge in a country like India about which people had declared that it has the road to salvation.

Gita Mehta, born in a well educated family of freedom fighters, is well aware of Indian cultural richness. She could hardly bear the sham and hypocrisy in its name, as was adopted by the so called spiritual gurus who could redeem the parching materialistic individuals from the west. Their misconception is that boarding a plane to India would open gates of salvation. If the book tells us about longing of occidental for salvation it also exposes the longing of Indians for the Bohemian kind of life which America offered. But her novel *Karma Cola Marketing the Mystic East Marketing the Mystic East* is not written in desperation of being an expatriate. Geeta Mehta adopts an objective stance in the portrayal of India. Infact the problem that seems to haunt is the human concern. And definitely this larger concern is reflective of the basic nature of Indian culture, which Gita Mehta seems to be imbibed with. However, after a lull of more than a decade the spark that ignited *Karma Cola Marketing the Mystic East Marketing the Mystic East* seems to have taken a serious turn; which came out in the form of *A River Sutra*. This novel dwells upon certain serious questions and answers of life and death. Certainly the gurus are more profound, wise and lovable who have realized truth that it springs in the human heart. Most of the characters understand the meaning of live in love, whether they are Tariq Mia, Professor Shankar or Master Mohan. This is how they define Karma which is the solution to all the modern day problems. It is ingrained more in psychic bed rather than in spiritual ashrams. In *A River Sutra*, Gita Mehta has tried to connect lives of two people. Here the river Narmada is the spiritual Sutra that links lives of people living near its banks. There
is yet another book *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse which seems to be identical to this with its spiritual healing quality.

The novel *A River Sutra* is about a bureaucrat turned manager of a rest house, who has given up the world. While visiting here he happens to come across sages, citizens, artists, musicians. He unveils the highest secret that redemption lays not in pursuit of knowledge, or God, or power. What is more sustainable is man to man relationships. The river appears to be very holy to him once when he looks at her as a human being. However a realization comes that the sanctity and sacredness of it is because of its human experiences that have spent lives here, of Nagababa who is now Professor Shankar. He does not give up life. Rather, he gives up death. His wisdom echoes that one can understand life by living instead of terminating it. Thus there is Tariq Mia, a respectable mullah, who is a kind person. Then there is a music instructor Master Mohan. Another tale is of Rahul Singh, a criminal and a gang leader. All of them have the commonality of showing the bank. The account of them is all about love, and principle that keeps the fountain of life flowing. There is no denial of life. Thus, Gita Mehta by taking through the journey of rich Indian cultural heritage of spiritualism suggests therapeutic measures of all the modern day, social, psychological and mental ailments.

There is yet another serious question which Gita Mehta shoots before the reader, as to if the man has come to the world just to live, or is it just a preparation of life. There is an intensification of this paradox of traditional myth and symbol. The very retirement of the bureaucrat to seek enlightenment in
natural ambience reflects grandiose and vitality of creation. There is richness of description of the Narmada in *A River Sutra*:

Woodlands heavy with wild Jasmine
Embrace you with their fragrance
Hearing you approach
Young plantain trees
Burst into sudden blossom (ARS 67)

The purposeful use of such symbols imply universality of associations. There is one note that reverberates is, that by renouncing, the enlightenment cannot be achieved. There has to be a balance struck between reason and passion, intellect and emotion, and logic and intuition, which essentially constitutes life. In case of anything in excess the other certainly balances it. Without such combinations, the life will be parched and directionless. Once the woes and sufferings are accepted, redemption is sure. This redemption in the vision can entail a tragic awareness of the contradictions of life and ability through it to experiences and arrive at a higher level of perception and transcendent awareness. In totality a man has to find answers to all his questions whether he finds it or not is another thing. It is possible through self-realization, stoical attitude, renunciation and anunciation and that can make man punctilious and upright.

Gita Mehta through the myth of Shiva, the Ascetic has tried to add aesthetic experience of salvation. There is a note that Shiva is the yogi of yogis who loves his wife-an embodiment of Shakti, the divine energy without whom the world will come to stand still. The message is that man would cease to exist if desire and logic does not subdue and enrich each other. The holy river is the prize that Shiva
receives by giving himself to penance. The river song is: Bring your knowledge of mankind and follow me. I will lead you to the next creation (ARS 278).

Gita Mehta has given a different dimension that passion can be a creative power which can cure, purge and emancipate. Thus she takes to unveiling an India quite contrary to the cause taken in *Karma Cola Marketing the Mystic East Marketing the Mystic East*, by using myth that shows the importance of rituals of self discovery.

Moreover, Gita Mehta is a keen follower of incidents and events that take place in India. She does not pin down herself to just the transcendent dimension of India. Exhibiting the principles of dynamics about the centre of the book *Snapshots of a Nation*, she explains:

India is a place where worlds and times are colliding with huge velocity: we’re putting satellites into space, and we have bullock carts; there is that constant tension and contradiction of immense sophistication and an almost pre-medieval way of life. I thought the only way I could describe that collision was anecdotally, by taking snap shots, as it were. (Ibmpc/linux/docs/Bold type interview with Gita Mehta htm by Wendy Smith)

There are essays that display that country India is fast changing, the oppressed women labour are being promoted by cooperative banks to go for self-employment. She lays her tremendous confidence on the voters who are oppressed, tamed, domesticated by the tyrannical ways of the Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her corrupt government during emergency, who throw her
out of power. The statement that: I am a camera and the reader can see through my eyes. (Lbmpc/linux/docs/Bold type interview with Gita Mehta htm by Wendy Smith)

Gita Mehta gives an account of her personal history and her survey of her native land. She does not seem to impose her views as an expert on India. Instead she leaves it to the reader to judge the validity of her stance as a writer.

Bharati Mukherjee is not a writer who condemns everything that is Indian, once she traced her true identity in a foreign land. The pangs of expatriation dominated in her first two novels. The sense of deprivation, discrimination gave severe blows to her during her stay in Canada, to an extent that her writings were just discarded as things without worth. Her novel, Management of Grief is built upon the incident of the Air India tragedy 1985 about the crash of an Air India plane travelling from Toronto to Bombay. This took away lives of 329 people, mostly of Indo-Canadian origin. The blowers of this Kanishka, Air India were identified as Sikh terrorists demanding a free Khalistan in India, and blowing was a part of their pressure tactics. When the dead bodies of relatives of Mrs. Bhave and Kusum’s husband and daughters are flown to Bombay, Shaila encounters a host of friends who come to pay their regrets and among them are Sikhs. She conceals her fear for them, but then rates her parents to be much evolved to the Canadian, who do not hold a community responsible for misdoings of their few. Shaila realizes that Canada, that appears to be technologically advanced and developed nation, confines itself in the narrow confinement of racism. The statement of the Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney bears a testimony to this, in which he offers condolences for India’s loss.
This exhibits the Euro centricity of the mosaic policy of immigration. This returning to radicalism is also very explicitly in 9/11 Twin Tower aftermath in America, where a sudden hostility towards Islamic followers erupted, both from the public and government quarters. The country which boasted of cherishing most secular, democratic value, absorbing various cultures and a universal and comprehensive constitution, fell miserably at the occurrence of an incident. However, despite growing communalism India did not display such retaliation towards a community for triggering insurgency and arranging mass massacres in Kashmir.

Bharati Mukherjee portrays the land that thrives to peace, hope even when it is put in the most hopeless situation. Other than the loss of their near and dears, these people are rejected, depressed, unaccepted in Canada. Yet they still hope. In Management of Grief Judith reveals this truth when she says: “They think signing a paper is signing their death warrant”. (MOG 195)

Mrs. Bhave understands the dilemma of Judith and remarks: “In our culture, it is a parent’s duty to hope” (MOG 195).

This she says is part of her Indian culture. When Judith abhors the next woman saying: “...is a mess” (MOG 195)

Shaila passively protest Judith by leaving the car without a word. Bharati Mukherjee seems to have developed her art of narration from her grandmother tales which had its moorings in Hindu Mythology. This sense of justice has been understandably desired from the Goddess Devi, the embodiment of energy and vanquisher of evil and demon in the world. In Leave it to Me there is a transformation of names from Baley clear water Iris – Daughter to Faustine to
Debby to Devi, is story of an abandoned child of a hippie from California and an India ‘guru’. Later she can not accept the affection of her foster family, and sets her foot out in search of bio-parents. Bharati Mukherjee does not contemplate on emotional, sentimental reunions. The child that has been abandoned has turned into a fury. The theme is of Kali who sets out take revenge and becomes dispenser of Divine Justice. With certain changes Mukherjee tries to match the beat generation’s life styles. But the imposition of Kali, appears to be a flawed one against the life style full of sensual pleasures and lack of moral uprightness. Debby or Devi also lacks spiritual depth. However then element of exile in *Jasmine* can also be seen as spiritual quest where there is a sense of loss, pangs of separation and dislocation of sensibilities which lead her to move towards the realization of the social and spiritual dimensions of existence. Carol P. Christ in his article *Image of Spiritual Power in Women’s Fiction* in the book *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality* edited by Charlene Spretnak implies that:

> ...new literature created by women has both a spiritual and a social dimension. It reflects both women’s struggle to create new ways of living in the world and a new naming of the great powers that provide orientation in the world. (IOSPIWF 328)

It implies that these struggles are the two sides of the same coin. In order to achieve this fulfillment the vital personal experience should be changed to a larger one, picking up action that broaden the horizon, helps in evolving and developing. This denotes that one has to transcend above the petty matters in order to be a complete person, and to attain self-realization, through opting right things and enlightenment. Jyoti tries to make her existence worthwhile, which had almost come to the terminating stage. Her transformation from Jyoti-
Jasmine-Jase-Jane explains her stages of evolution i.e. “from helpless doomed to widow hood in exile” (J 3) in the most humbled down condition she has the realization of her power. The heroic encounter with a mad dog makes her realize herself as a : “...buzz of power”. (J 54).

She rejects marriage. She also learns permissible rebellion against the social trends and she maximizes to her advantage.

Jasmine’s pursuit of pleasure and victory may not be seen as a part of hedonism. She does not become depressed. Instead, this endeavor on her part leads her to discover herself and self satisfaction. She escapes committing suicide for this reason.

Carol P. Christ in essay *Image of Spiritual Powers in Women Fiction* describes women’s fiction:

Women’s social quest concerns women’s struggle to get respect, equality and freedom in society... In the social quest a women begins in alienation from the human community and seeks new modes of relationship and action in society. In addition - Women’s Spiritual Quest concerns a woman’s awakening to the depths of her soul. (IOSPIWF 329)

Jasmine starts yearning for respect, parity, and liberty. She in her search alienates from the society and seeks for new relationships. She also undertakes as spiritual journey to delve deep into the depths of her soul in order to become a part of a large consciousness, where she drops her individual identity and this elevates her in moments. Bharati Mukherjee tries to evolve the character of
Jasmine by making her yearn for absolute life in Indian context: “We are shells of the same absolute.” (J 15)

This concept leads her to develop relationships with people. She wants to develop herself in various fronts of being intellectual, of elite taste, compassionate, loving and witty. But Mukherjee has tried to give a different dimension to this spirituality. Unlike putting spirituality, marital submissiveness into a strait jacket, she has tried to cross the national barrier expanding her universal consciousness. *Holder of the World* was yet another Sita's story, which Bhagmati feels that as a part of ‘shruti’ and ‘smriti’ the Geetha through oral tradition is kept alive. To Bhagmati the story of Sita embodies womanhood and marital refinement in its most ideal state. She intentionally narrates this strong story to Hannah in order to infuse values of Indian culture in her. Hannah remains unconvinced with the story told by Sita about her abduction by Ravana. Contrastingly Hannah is rescued by an alien man. She breaks the ties of faithfulness and seduces her rescuer Jadav Singh, who is a man from an alien land and she gets patronage on that alien land. Here Hannah’s husband unlike Rama is not faithful. When Bhagmati unlike Sita is raped she is not rejected and disowned by her family as the case was with Sita. With Sita chastity is an essential element for a ideal womanhood in patriarch Hindu culture but in case of Bhagmati and Hannah they break all the tradition. Both Hannah and Bhagmati try to position and adapt themselves in contrast to Sita to understand their experiences as women. But Sita’s story cannot be appropriated in context of a native and an immigrant woman, as they are different because of cultural
location and racial identity rather than similar because of their shared identity as women. Bharati Mukherjee accepts that her initial bringing up in a joint family setup made her grow emotionally strong. The complexities, intricacies and intrigues made her understand the human psyche all the more better.

Salman Rushdie despite leaving India keeps returning back to India with a greater sense of concern. He expresses his despotism on seeing a fault line developing among various religions and communities. He considers himself as one of the proud inheritors of Indian multiculturalism. He admits of India being culturally rich as it was receptive and tolerant towards the culture which was brought to India even by the invaders. He lauds and remains boastful of her past tolerance which provided such diverse features to her personality. Rushdie nostalgically returns back to the era of depicting cultural ties between two great civilizations that which are between India and Greece. There is also returning back to the era of Portuguese occupation of sixteenth Century when Bombay alias Mumbai was handed over in a marriage to Queen Catherine in Midnight’s Children. In The Ground Beneath Her Feet… the protagonist is seen digging the ground near the beach which symbolically alludes to the longing for going back to the past. However, he expresses his despotism over the growing intolerance between the communities. Rushdie refers to the divide along the linguistic lines and sense of hatred dividing Gujaratis and Marathis after the formation of Gujarat state, when Bombay was handed over to Maharastra despite the wild protest made by Gujratis. Rushdie in Midnight’s Children looks at Kashmir as the paradise on earth where peace and amity added to the bounteous beauty of Kashmir. He roams over the enchanting land of serenity and ecstasy where people are not suspected as spies and are not gunned down for
photographing the beauty of nature and bridges. He purposely creates an air of freedom and fearlessness with army free lakes and a serpentine convoy of camouflaged jeeps, trucks through Gulmarg and Baramullah pass. The contrasting images of Kashmir has a deeper undercurrent of message to convey that the unpardonable neglect committed on the part of politicians and bureaucrat has converted this once upon a paradise on earth into a dungeon hell. Another aspect that has led him to accept that there is a mother fixation like feeling with Bombay and its entire culture. He tries to pick out certain techniques of Bombay cinema and use it freely in his novel. These influences can be seen in his narratives which parodies the movies of Bombay. The influence of Bombay cinema is conspicuous in the narrative situations like mistaken exchange of child at birth and the character that are good as ayah, Mary Periera. The can be similarity drawn in picking up characters especially good mothers or bad mothers or step mothers. These are heroes and villains, heroines and vamps.

The novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is multi layered epic novel of a very rich man from Bombay Abraham Zogoiby and his wife who is an artist and who bears an evidence of an Oedipal mix-up involving Aurora Zogoiby, her son Moreas (Moor) Zogoiby and his mistress Uma Saraswati. He introduces to the malice of infinite propensity existing between the big business houses with gangs taking up various offensives against each other. There is also a grave concern over the rising fundamentalism both of Hindu and Muslim type and their provocative stances in enhancing it, especially in a city like Bombay which stands for multiculturalism.

The woman in *Midnight’s Children* is offered a strong mix of modernizing as well as a seat of traditional taboos. However the text tries to bring to the fact
when Adam Aziz asks her to come out of Purdah, it indicates woman's freedom in the narrative of nationalism. When Adam and Naseem move to Amritsar, Naseem for the first time is exposed to the multiplicity of India when Aziz sets fire to her Purdah veils: Buckets are brought; the fire goes out; and Naseem comes on the bed as about thirty five Sikhs, Hindus and untouchables throng in the smoke filled room. (MC 33)

This particular instance leads up to the idea that woman is metaphorically changing her identity from regional to the national, and her exposure is the turning point in secular modernity. There is yet another Oedipal trace when Adam Aziz’s mother comes out of Purdah to finance her son’s education. There is a moment when Adam Aziz after the Purdah burning episode says to his wife: Forget about being a good Kashmiri girl, start thinking about being a modern Indian woman. (MC 33)

In the name of nationalism the women are expected to keep their traditional inhibition aside and when resisted: You or What? Says Naseem when Aziz requests her to come out of Purdah. You want me to walk naked in front of strange men. (MC 33).

Rushdie has somehow tried to project woman to be the point of confluence, and nation.

In *Midnight’s Children* his India of vision reappears in the bioscope which gives them sight of unified India: Inside the peep show of Lifafa Das were pictures of the Taj Mahal, and Meenakshi Temple, and the holy Ganges... untouchables being touched; educated persons sleeping in large number on railway lines. (MC 84)
This is not so, as the children in the city still a dream of integrated India. Whereas in Delhi, the fundamentalist (Ravana gang) scares Muslims. In reaction a mob of Muslims corners a Hindu Lifafa Das but there once again Amina Sinai adopts the stature of a mother and averts the riot:

Listen, my mother shouted:

Listen well, I am with child. I am a mother who will have a child and I am giving this man my shelter. Come on now, if you want to kill, kill a mother also and show the world what men you are! (MC 86)

Thus once again this motherly rescue gives her the image of integrity and completeness. A woman stands as an aspiration for one single integrated India.

There is however a new dimension of a woman that wields power over the nation. She subjugates the entire nation to her feet at the very swish of her power crazy sword. Rushdie allegorically exposes Mrs. Gandhi’s imposition of emergency as an indictment of self, controlled media with the concocted stories of development of the people, but turn its back on the excesses of the government. There had been a very large number of people who lost their lives while protesting against emergency rule. The entire government machinery merely became puppet in the hands of Indira Gandhi. The censorship imposed, paralyzed the forth estate. All her dictatorial acts were upheld as the acts of ‘Devi’. The top leadership that ran out of wits to the extent by proclaiming: Indira is India and India is Indira. (MC 427)

The only challenge that is posed to her is from Salim Sinai who is the voice of plural identity. One is power crazy and the other wants to take over the
power of aesthetics. Then there are series of leaders some who hooked up in their own idiosyncrasies and the other handicapped because of their physical ailments.

However, throughout the novel one can sense an undercurrent of optimism over dependency. The entire writing exercise can be seen as preserving and ‘chutnifying’ Saleem’s marginalized identity and history for new generation. There is a message of opening the universe a little more. The ending of the novel bears the testimony to the influence of Indian cinema over the mind of Rushdie. As in the Shyam Benegal’s movie ‘Ankur’ in the ending scene the young boy throws stone at the landlord’s house making the beginning (although symbolically) of a rebellion against oppressive forces, just like that by the child growing in maid servants womb, which is one that belongs to the landlord himself turns out to be his own source of destruction. Similarly Rushdie concludes his novel with boy at its focal points. The ‘empty jar’ has its own significance. Although he gives an account of his own past, but does not venture out in touching the jar. He alternatively suggests that the marginalized survive despite the sweeping forces.

Rushdie’s passionate involvement with India especially with Bombay and its status and culture can be seen in :

Our Bombay, Padma!... grew at a breakneck speed, acquiring a cathedral and an equestrian stature of the Maratha warrior king Shivaji which (we used to think) came to life at night and galloped awesomely through the city streets - right along Marine Drive! On Chowpaty sands! (MC 93)
Rushdie confesses through Salim that he can never retrace his moorings within himself as this with the places of his exile, in Pakistan: “I won’t deny it: I never forgave Karachi for not being Bombay”. (MC 307)

Rushdie’s opinion is time bound. His Bombay vibrant with culture degenerates proudly into a land of reclamation leading to hollow golden age. This age is marked by frauds, fakes and complacencies. Rise of youth gangs and growing fundamentalism. The autocratic rule of Indira Gandhi bent upon demolishing democratic structure of the nation.

Referring to his novel The Moor’s Last Sigh it sounds like a distant cry over the loss of golden age and advancement towards the apocalypse. Firstly he refers to the golden period before the imposition of emergency. The paintings by multiculturalists of Goa and Bombay, according to Aurora Zogoiby:

Jews, Christian, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains crowded into her paint Boabdils fancy dress balls and the sultan (Boabdil)...
as his old skin dropped from Chysalis fashion, standing, revealed as a glorious butterfly. (TMLS 227)

Rushdie heavily depends upon the Indian past. He weaves his cornucopia and India’s rich pantheon meticulously enabling him to reap rich returns with regards to meaning. It helps in extracting meaning of serious relevance of the historical and political situation in Indian subcontinent. He with caution gives title like Many Headed Monsters, Revelation. There is a mystical reference to Ravana and Hanuman. At the same time there is a mention of St. John the divine which reflects the secular nature of the myths that have been borrowed. There are Hindu, Christian, Islamic and Greek mythical source that
have been utilized. Rushdie keeps reminding his readers that richness in Indian culture has been rendered by its multiculturalism. Parvati – the witch, who becomes Parvati Layoloti when she marries Salim Sinai, becomes an epitome of amity between Hindus and Muslims. He keeps adding myths of Kailash in order to give authenticity to his secular beliefs. Infact in India, secularism is at its foundation. This gets reflected in the constitution where the rights are one and same for all and one can practice preach, and propagate one’s religion without hurting down the sentiments of the other. Thus Rushdie seems to be reminiscing the mythical past of India and its adaptableness an openness that provided momentum to it. He becomes nostalgic at the very thought that this cornucopia of his, that has given lot of thrust to his creativity even while living outside has started distancing itself from all the above said qualities. The dragon of fundamentalism is already to pounce upon the secular identity which leaves this wonderful ancient land devoid of multiculturalism.

There is also a retracing of steps by going back to the fifteenth century Granada and before the golden era of Sultan Boabdil, before the fall of Alhambra, which was at the Peak of Muslim Empire in Spain. This age declined as Sultan Boabdil who is reincarnated as Moor-Auroa Zogoiby’s son with a club hand, due to lack of courage could not safeguard the civilization as represented by Alhambra. Moor is unable to defend his mother’s honour and safeguard the masterpieces of his mother. However Sultan Boabdil and Moor who are one and the same in different ages share similar fate of keeping like a woman: “...for what they could not depend like man”. (TMLS 432)
Then there are betrayals by Moor and Uma Saraswati of his mother. He aces further downfall where he joins the bandwagon of Mainduck Fielding the Hindu fundamentalist, who pose threat to Aurora's multicultural secular identity. It is lack of courage that brings failure to him when he can not save across spiritual protagonist, the Japanese woman. There is also description of Goa that offers a golden opportunity of establishing a dynasty in Goa on Black Gold. But soon it is transformed by horror and evil, as if the flood of emotion has brought the civilization to an end. There is lot of infidelity, intolerance in marriage, lust for power, the sadistic pleasure in destroying and seeking revenge.

The novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* keeps shifting between heaven and hell. Rushdie assigns heavenly status to India, which seems to exist in the multicultural golden ages or in Aurora's Elephanta. But one travels through the hellish experience in the ultimate part of the novel, and due to alienated hollowness and worthlessness in the symbolical narration of Bengali.

Salman Rushdie's novels can have yet another dimension that one can also look at it as national allegory which has been interwoven to open up imaginative vistas and also give a hue to its history. Rushdie has been able to draw the attention of critics, who are mostly keen on reading it as national allegory. Their main intention is to point out those areas that have been dropped out, or left out from the major course of events. However critics categorize his novels as typical post-modern interpretation of Rushdie where the consciousness for nationalism is false and to appreciate him for transcending the nation-state consciousness is far from truth. In fact his effort is to try to fictionalize the nation, its history, but one can't run away from the blatant fact that there is an element of truth in it and the large truth is that did the nation ever exist.
Studies reveal that Rushdie himself was a great pursuer of history. This special lurching to history somehow compelled him to pen down the serpentine course that a nation like India has taken from the times immemorial. Infact Rushdie seems to have realized that it was the nation’s blunder not to have a canonical account of happenings and so he picked up her art form in giving a detailed account of the a missing links and the spirit of the bygone era. Infact David Lipscomb goes to the extent by proving that Rushdie was either obsessed with Stanley Wolpert’s *A New History of India* or he was reading simultaneously while planning out his great fiction *Midnight’s Children*. What he realized was that the history written by the professionals only looked for the gaps in the earlier works. So he contemplated on textualising of history, where one can see a well defined narrative without overlooking the chronological events of happenings.

Whenever Salman Rushdie writes a novel with India as its backdrop, one realizes that it is more of a wailing for paradise lost. May be that Salman Rushdie quite strangely might have entered into the mother fixation after setting his sales for British Isles. It’s the isolation from vibrant multiplicity of India that might have aggravated his yearning to look back into its past, while he was made to live in the rich monotony of England. His running away from the poverty, backwardness, illiteracy and dirt of India, ironically intensified his zeal to return back to India in its myth and reality. The element which he found worth picking up and weaving a narrative was the modern India placed against its glorious past. Salman Rushdie might have designed a strategy in which he could have dreamt of occupying the similar place as has been occupied by Milton. It was Milton’s puritanical beliefs that compelled him to write *Paradise Lost* with a
grand design that made him immortal. Rushdie somehow secretly cherished the idea of occupying a similar status once enjoyed by Milton. Salman Rushdie would have yearned to write about the fall of civilization and the loss of multiculturalism, in comparison to Milton’s fall of man and the loss of innocence. But then the stark realities of the twentieth century compelled him to realize that the mythical eras of Sita and Helen of Troy have ended. One is forced to live in an era which is highly commercialized with rampant gang wars and violence and transformation to banal pop-culture. Thus he knows that writing a tragedy may be the biggest blunder in such an era, so he mockingly parodies it.

Rushdie can’t stop himself from categorizing the golden age into two well defined compartments. The golden period according to him existed before 1975 with special reference to Mumbai and Goa where people of different faiths- Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains lived together in harmony. In *The Moors Last Sigh* this becomes quite evident from Aurora Zogoiby’s paintings:

Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains crowded into her paint Boabdil’s fancy dress balls and the Sultan [Boabdil] as his old skin dropped from him in chrysalis fusion, standing revealed as a glorious butterfly. (TMLS 227)

Thus Rushdie moans over the tragic destruction of multiculturalism by fundamentalism which may be pseudo religious and sectarian in nature. Somewhere in his mind everything that was in past was glorious, which kept the nation in paradise. But this paradise is lost on account of two misdeeds. One that most glorious spirit which India as a nation could boast of was the spirit of
democracy. King Bharat after whom the nation was named only initiated the trend of passing the rein of the kingdom to the most able man, and not to the natural heir. The most significant quality that nation India possesses is that it allowed its people to follow any religion even when it came to practicing religion of the invaders. India is also a nation that gave liberty to the princess to select their bridegrooms. India is also portrayed as a nation that boasts of discussing everything that governs human life. The very spirit of democracy was the main constituent that kept the nation going. But with the advent of sorceress (Indira Gandhi) who in her autocratic tyrannical style paralyzed the entire age old body of India by infusing emergency in it. He is quite categorical in stating that from there onwards the decay hastened up. She demolished every democratic institution that came her way. She didn’t even leave the opportunity of conquering the Indian wombs by imposing of compulsory family planning programme. The nation that could laud of giving free flight to imagination, disagreement, disapprovals and the land that honoured men of knowledge and those who followed the path of truth, at the single stroke of her baton were put behind the bars. A single voice of disagreement was either silenced or captivated. The very air that smelt of freedom was choked. The nation that had shown the world that it is only by following democratic way an individual or a nation can prosper. This craving for power has set the ball of decadence roll down. In sequel to this is the same spirit that fostered democratic spirit, led to the acceptance of divergent views, philosophies and religion. This in turn induced tremendous tolerance within various divergent groups that they could live in peace among themselves. This spirit only enriched their culture. There can be seen so much of borrowing from each other’s cultural practices which
made the entire civilization a kaleidoscope of various cultures, throwing various, and charming exciting patterns. This multiculturalism was one trait which captivated the imagination of people in other parts of the world that how could different cultures be seen living together in a single nation, and yet remain undivided over major issues. Here was a place where one can have a glimpse of almost all the civilizations that surfaced up in the world. But these variegated patterns in the Indian Kaleidoscope were disturbed after the demolition of Babri Masjid. Even the places like Goa and Mumbai were susceptible to communal forces that once carried the torch of multicultural society. Salman Rushdie however cannot come to terms that one evil can be equated with other evil. Had this been the case, such disturbances would have cropped up much earlier, immediately after the invaders tried to undo with its heritage. What perplexes him the most is that why this so called ‘Balancing Acts’ of history as termed by V.S. Naipaul has occurred at all? A nation that could absorb all the foreign invasions, attacks on its culture, can suddenly after centuries try to take revenge of these misdeeds. Rushdie suffered from the sense of this loss only when he landed in England, when the society was strongly divided against racial, financial and religious lines. He realized that if at all there is any hopes that can make the world learn the lesson of tolerance, it is with India. But then he gets disillusioned with the breaking of communal riots in a country on which he rested his entire hopes.

Rushdie also points out that India which could sustain all the shocks because it was the concept of mother (Bharat Mata) that evoked in all Indians a sense of duty towards his motherland. Rushdie says : Motherness… is a big idea in India, may be the biggest; the land as mother, the mother as land, as the firm ground beneath our feet. (TMLS 137)
Rushdie feels that it is the traditional role of mothers who were kind, compassionate and the mothers cast in rural moulds, a mother who is ready to take up any challenge thrown to her, that too against all the odds. Rukhmini Bhaya Nair in her article *What Did Rushdie Mean and Why* in a literary review of the English daily *The Hindu* says about these mothers: But then her motherly all benevolent image, sacrificing image faces gets dented when he realizes that they are transformed to sophisticated, noisy, angry and different... (WDRSMW XII)

Salman Rushdie voices his concern by showing spurt of infidelity that is caused by boredom, the martial incompatibility, the breach of martial sanctity, betrayals, lust for power and sadistic pleasure in demolishing and taking revenge. All these traits are seen to be more conspicuous in women than in men. He feels it was the Indian woman till nineteen sixty that provided strength to its structure. But then with the advent of foreign business companies the scene gradually started changing. The women of the modern era are more vocal about their needs. Quite dramatically they are transformed to treacherous, revengeful and ambition laden. Time and again in all this novels a deep sense of realization surfaces-up, that if India could maintain its continuity it was because of the mother, the woman that kept the nation moving despite several assaults from outside and the neglect which she had to continuously face. There too she did not waver from her faithful stance. This way, he lauds the Indian woman of the bygone era, before them he could only subjugate in reverence. But then at the same time presses the alarm that if India is going to nurture women like Aurora Zogiby in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, then the catastrophe is
certain. His prophecy in this novel seems to come true when in his novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* he ends up as disenchanted man, with all hopes shattered and the ground beneath her feet cracking.

Bharati Mukherjee believes that India has always been a land with plurality of tradition and ways. This gets quite clear in Manju Kale’s article *Travelling in Time, A Review of the Holder of the World* where Bharati Mukherjee in narrating this, zooms her camera for Americans: “Look how you were in contact with the larger world there. Today yours is this world. Yesterday it was the fabled orient as for tomorrow, who knows”. (TITIRW 15)

Bharati Mukherjee attracts the readers’ attention through her characters and emphasizes that the survival is for the one who improvises, not for one who plays, by the rules. She seems to be in a ceaseless conversation which forever haunts her. She sees herself as a unique human being and gives message to her fellow females. In fact it is the term expatriation that necessarily implied the foreseeing of one country in search of greener pastures. This in turn necessarily means exile, voluntarily or compulsorily. The process is a complex one and difficult to analyze for the person is subjected to multiplicity of emotions which includes a wistful longing for the past, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new hostile surrounding and assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forged on one by the environment. It encourages the writers to take the literary journey home, towards history, towards memory. Writing about one’s country in an alien surroundings forces a writer subconsciously or unconsciously to romanticize it and to mystify it. Bharati
Mukherjee’s experiences in the countries of the whites in the initial years, not as an expatriate, were not very encouraging. The very colour of her skin reduced her stature to the minimal where all her achievements as an individual were to be sacrificed at the altar of raised consciousness. Bharati Mukherjee who always created the self and maintained it, found it difficult when her writings were rejected by the Canadians, she with her husband returned to India. Like every expatriate turned into immigrant, like V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, she journeys into this land of multidimensional culture having miraculous qualities of healing and emancipation. Canada can be rightly said to be surviving on the theory of pseudo Darwinism where superiority of the white races, scored over the colonies populated by the darker races. Bharati Mukherjee wrestles with two mighty oppressors, one that believes in the superiority of the colour of the skin which she eventually over years of hard labour overcomes after her final immigration to the USA. The second force is more powerful, for she experienced it in her home land, in Canada and in the USA the giant of sexual discrimination. Bharati Mukherjee, however could not mitigate the power of the Indian Goddesses with the very exposure to larger than life character, through grandmothers mythological tales and her grounding in the Bengali culture. She was drenched to the soul with the spirit of “Shakti” that Bengal embodies. In fact her narration has acquired a new richness and complexity owing to her singular dovetailing of the narrative line with diverse perspectives- Indian, feminine and immigrant. She has with the skill of a craftsman grafted the experience of an alien on an existentialistic framework which makes up for the universal implications of being one and the force which
drives an individual in the modern absurd world to experience Diaspora in *Jasmine* 1990 Epigraph she says: The new geometry mirrors a universe that is rough, not rounded, scabrous, not smooth, a geometry of the pitted, pocked, and brokering, the twisted, tangled and intertwined. (JE)

Bharati Mukherjee’s first visit to Toronto in 1966, with her family and her fourteen years of stay in Canada exhausted her to extinction. She could hardly see herself as with outlines that could make any difference to the environs in which she was. This disappearance of her self is reflected in her essay, *An Invisible Woman*. There was yet another feeling of getting fragmented into many selves, and it was difficult for her to keep it together, she said: Many including myself left (Canada) unable to keep our twin halves together. (AIW 40)

However simultaneously she was in courtship with a North American a child of divorced parents that culminated into marriage, and at the same time she took up her project of doing Ph.D. Infact these were the two factors that distanced her from the world of passive privilege that she had come from. She accepted that in Calcutta M.A. English was considered to be quite ornamental but venturing out for Ph.D. was looked at with awe. She confesses in *An Invisible Woman*: An M.A. in English is considered refined, but a doctorate is far too serious a business; indicative more of Brains than beauty likely to lead to quarrelsome nature. (AIW 36)

This kept her away from her family. For Bharati Mukherjee it was always landing in a land not ready to assimilate her. Firstly it was India that could hardly come to terms with her ambition, training and marriage which was hardly acceptable to a tradition bound Brahmanial society. It was these rebellious traits
that distanced her from her homeland despite she drew her energy from the very land of Goddess Kali and Durga. Infact if one tries to go further down the alleys of time, one will find that her typical rebellious nature, her feminism has deep roots in the cultural revival and Nari Jagran, renaissance of Bengal. Bengal was the state that lighted the torch to combat the darkness of woman, child marriage and Sati Pratha. In fact a train of stalwarts like Micheal Madhusudan Dutt, Ishwar Chand Vidya Sagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekanand, Toru Duit, who revolted against gender discrimination and ill-treatment given to women. There were writers who tried to evoke sympathy for woman like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Rabindra Nath Tagore.

Bengal which had once been the land of oppression, social decay, class discrimination, poverty, illiteracy and famine, was shown direction by these giants. In Bharati Mukherjee there is a woman yearning for a woman who was revered, feared and admired in the days of mythology, a Goddess like character who wants to uproot everything that has been with male view point. The spirit of renaissance, and these writers in some way or the other have also added a progressive dimension to her in which not only does she want to be a Kali vanquishing the foes, but is also bent upon in breaking all the so called moral codes once set by Indian males to bury their fear of having overcome by woman. Thus whenever she tries to portray violence through her woman characters, she infact is trying to bring back the Phoenician Indian woman of the past into bones and flesh, but with changed sensibilities, a woman who will mitigate the entire demon’s from her world, a woman who has not just gained recognition but she
has also been given freedom to set her own course of life. There can be parallels drawn between the weak Bharati in Canada and the woman of early nineteenth and the one of mid nineteenth century India both dissolved with anonymity. Anonymity levied by males to the extent that they drew sadistic pleasure in crushing a woman already gasping for breath. She had in fact made a very positive image of goddess especially of a woman through grandmother’s tales and mythologies but when was faced with the stark realities of the world she wanted to level down these differences. In fact when she portrays woman in a violent mood, overpowering her male counterpart. She takes the stance of a missionary who has set her foot out in order to tell the world that the Indian woman who is considered to be oppressed, tortured, abused and a bundle of weakness is no more the same. She wants to voice as loud as she can, that Indian woman cannot be tamed and tortured to extinction. They can be subdued but if not treated carefully can be devastating as Kali. In fact while portraying her woman characters she tacitly tries to bring to the fore that Indian woman are made of tremendous patience to bear fortunes and yet be forgiving. What is most striking about them is that she accepts all Tughlaqi Farmaan (absurd orders) from them and follows them to the last commas and full stops knowing that disobeying these farmaan would infuriate their God’s of small things and thus resulting into a chaotic situation at home. But by doing this she rises in stature as it is easy to torture, but it is difficult to bear the tortures knowing that one is on the right path. However Bharati Mukherjee also alarmingly tells her readers that the woman has not been tamed for eternity. Her forbearance too has a limit. She is not just a dead log of wood; instead she is a dormant volcano that can erupt on subjecting to excessive pressures.
Bharati Mukherjee tacitly tries to show the world that the Indian woman once considered to be a passive living being and of heterogeneous element can be as adaptive to any country as anyone else. When she lands in America she is a woman totally transformed, a woman with American orientation. But the fact is that she longingly designates herself as Bengali Indian American not ready to wear the borne identity of American woman: However her dissatisfactions surfaces up in An Invisible Woman, which she wrote in Canada. She is not welcome here either. She says:

“In Montreal, I was simultaneously a full professor at McGill, an author, a confident lecturer, and (I like to think) a charming and competent hostess and guest and a house bound, fearful, aggressive, obsessive, unforgiving queen of bitterness. Whenever I read articles about woman committing suicide. I knew I was looking into mirror” (AIW 39)

This was quite tormenting for her to live as a Canadian citizen married to a North American author. In fourteen years of her stay, her dreams were shattered and her ego broken that how an English educated woman, married to a white man and placed in the privileged class society in social and economic terms can be taken in Darkness: for a prostitute or a shop lifter or frequently assumed to be a domestic, praised by astonished auditor that (she) didn’t have a sing song accent. (D 2)

When Bharati Mukherjee left India, she had said good bye to caste distinction. She had an upbringing in which she did not accept the supreme order of being a member of Brahanical order. However it was quite against
her expectations that Canada offered racism-another form of caste system. This is quite instrumental in changing her psyche. In her essay Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties she confesses:

The experience of violent unhousment from a biological homeland and rehousement in an adopted homeland that is not always welcoming to its dark complexioned citizens have tested me as a person and me the writer I am today. (BMSTN 33)

The novel, The Tiger’s Daughter (1972) and Wife (1975) depict the classical cultural conflict between the east and the west. The female protagonists are Indian who have to undergo the cultural shock. Although they are quite similar but have reversal of the position of the protagonists. Tara the female protagonist of The Tiger’s Daughter has mental and physical reaction, when she returns back to Calcutta, the city where she was born. And there is Dimple who can’t adjust to New York where she goes as a young bride with her engineer husband. She undergoes tremendous traumatic experience. Thus by portraying a woman in reversed condition she expresses her dilemma and confusion, whether the culture in which she wants to assimilate can be as welcome as the one she wants to leave. The very name Tara, means the manifestation of Goddess Durga, and the other Dimple, a slight depression, on the surface signifies the linked impact that she can leave upon the New York society.

Bharati Mukherjee can also be seen trotting similar steps as V.S. Naipaul did, when in Days and Nights in Calcutta, she writes:

“In myself I detect a pale and immature reflection of Naipaul; it is he who has written movingly about the pain and absurdity of art and
exile of ‘Third World act’ and exile among the former colonizers, the tolerant incomprehension of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a desh”. (DANIC 287)

From this it is quite evident that Bharati Mukherjee wanted herself to be placed in the same category as Naipaul was. In Darkness she confesses:

“Like V.S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the art, expatriation. Like Naipaul, I used moderate and self-protective irony in describing my character’s pain irony promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well-bred post colonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong”. (D 2)

A very detailed observation of Bharati Mukherjee reveals that her perception of Indian life is much different from that of V.S. Naipaul. With V.S. Naipaul it is more of disgust, and inability to identify himself with India. But with Bharati Mukherjee, it is an our burst of an Indian woman tied in shackles for centuries together. It is rather redefining the Indian woman who in initial years brought up in traditional way wants to define herself in the latest context that she is not an individual that can be overruled. However with Naipaul it is more of a shock to wakeup from the dream which he had been seeing for a long time. Bharati Mukherjee’s disgust for India is a long drawn frets and frustrations of Indian woman, a wife, whose growth has been stunted by her husband and is not allowed to grow freely. The very migrations to America open up new vistas of freedom, but at the cost of exploitation and violence. Her aversion for India is more of frustration as she finds it difficult to get mingled with Americans. She keeps longing for India as America could not bring happiness and satisfaction
which she dreamt of before leaving India. But her dissatisfaction grows firstly on seeing the city changed in all these years. And then every small change broils disagreement and disgust for her husband. The arrogance with which she had left India, hoping that her anglicized self would be welcomed open arms by the west. But to her dismay she was given a cold shoulder. She remained unabsorbed in the western culture, and her yearning to get identified with the culture of her land proved to be a distant dream. However in writing about India time and again was not able to detach herself from the image of the woman of bygone mythological days.

When Gita Mehta picks up her pen while writing *Raj*, she is not just exposing the ill treatment with the woman, especially with the widows. She journeys from innocence to maturity. The trait that emerges out that these abandoned lots were most of the time in the bygone years was compelled to perform Sati. But then the entire women do not throw themselves to it. In case of Jaya, the true knowledge dawns upon her when she is given sermon by the ascetic that the Satis are not those who burn themselves to ashes with their husbands, rather they are the ones who possess: the will to continue when the familiar world fragments around her (R 127).

When Bharati Mukherjee takes one back to the ‘Raj’ period she tries to expose to the flash-off point, from where a woman is pulled out from Purdah to acquire all the worldly knowledge, which was once men’s domain. Jaya’s father can foresee the relevance of imparting education and training in other areas of concerning administering and running of the state. Jaya’s father is the embodiment of the transformation that was creeping into the minds of males of
that era. However initially it appears that ‘Jaya’ in Raj is another domesticated lot who unerringly takes down all the dictates of her husband to the last comma and full stop. She bears the neglect of her husband and yet remains good angel to him. She is also deprived of the mental bliss from her husband, as theirs is the marriage of political convenience; as the king has the role of a passport assigned to her, to facilitate to visit England and other countries his ‘play boy’ image deprives him to travel without a wife. There she is rebuked for being not ignorant about foreign language and culture. The rulers (husband) wrath extends to the extent depriving her right of feeding her child, the biggest solace to any mother, and the ultimate ambrosia to any child. By subjugating herself Jaya does not give up herself as a log of wood. Instead she shoots questions protesting validity of imposing such atrocities and neglect upon a wife. She is the true spirit of an Indian woman who while inundated during monsoons and following mountain rapids does not leave its sides.

This quality emerges out when Jaya is forced to wear gloves in order to shake hands while greeting the Prince of Wales, to this she politely declines and opts for folding her hands typical of Indian tradition. While living a regal life she even doesn’t let herself to become a woman of easy virtues. She upholds the virtues of an Indian wife, who abhors being touched by another man, even if it is King Emperor himself. In her novel Raj, The discussion between her husband and herself goes like this:

“My grand father had to impress the Prince’s grandfather by swearing, my grandmother would not commit Sati. But if you were to play polo with us, could the Empire doubt Sirpur’s commitment to progress”? 
Jaya freed her arm. ‘In exchange, you will excuse me from the ball’.

Prince Pratap slammed the car door. ‘Out of question. You are Victor’s hostesses’.

“Then let me say I do not dance”.

Jaya saw the combative glance in his eyes, as if her exhibition of courage were eroding the barrier between them. It is a bargain, Princess. Play polo and you don’t have to dance. (R 221-222)

Jaya then undergoes a series of trials, firstly loosing her husband, and secondly her only son Arjun, which leaves her completely broken. She is also deprived of any status that could be rendered to her after the states were annexed. But then truly in her Phoenician stride quite characteristic of Indian woman, fills up the form for election in order to serve her people. Gita Mehta has truly depicted the mettle of which Indian woman is made that she has tremendous patience, compassion, love, resilience to adapt to the changing conditions. However in doing so she does not give away her sexual desires and passions. While she shares bed with Arun Roy she has least guilt of not being virtuous. This satisfies her long hidden hunger of experiencing sexual gratification. She epitomizes the true spirit of Indian woman with positive connotation.

Gita Mehta somehow could not dislodge herself from expatriate status as it’s the richness that India holds in her treasure and yet it is nation that is looked down upon, a nation that has lost its relevance. She was livid to see the Beatles
squeaking talking about Karma as if their single flight, dollars have bestowed them with Nirvana. She was even more aghast to see the so called Indian spiritual Gurus, somehow their ingenious device emptying their pockets. Since it was an era tumultuous of spiritualism and Nirvana in America, Gita Mehta attacked vehemently the purposelessness of such transaction in a satirical way.

After a lull of more than a decade when she came out with a novel, she exhibited giving more thought, study and analysis to the Indian philosophy. In fact A River Sutra takes to the inner journey of consciousness which gets endorsed when Lubbock in his book The Craft of Fiction says: “As quickly we read, it melts and shifts in the memory”. (TCOF 156)

Gita Mehta repudiates to accept that India is a spent force. She time and again portrays Indian sensibilities. She movingly interprets the tenets of Indian culture and rich heritage that it cherishes. She picked up Narmada River as the Sutra, which ties various facets of Indian culture in a single thread.

There is a bureaucrat who in search of peace resigns his job and takes up as a manager in a guest house. But quite contrarily he realizes the tremendous impact of religion, music, mythology and philosophy. Gita Mehta injects six various stories. “The Monks”, “The Musicians”, “The Teachers”, The Executives”, “The Courtesans”, “The Minstrel”. In these stories she delves deep into the depths of human psyche and the jargon that governs human emotions. It also shows the dichotomy that is spread all over India. She fathoms deep down into the human beings to have a feel of their feelings especially when faith and values are rapidly depleting. Gita Mehta at the same
time breaks the myth of India being a land of mysticism, transcendentalism and passivism. She reverses this cliché by asserting that Man is a greatest truth. There is nothing beyond.

Gita Mehta has been lauded for her documentary satire. We see that she has tried to incorporate a multicolour hue of life and even death. Gita Mehta’s style lacks complexity and she does not allow herself to become ambiguous. She has somehow tried to maintain a rationalistic tone which her emotional and passionate fixation to India and its heritage becomes a strong undercurrent. She can be seen exhibiting tremendous wit. There is also humor of unusual quality with funny incidents that appear to be true in nature.

In *A River Sutra* her resting of hope in the Indian heritage, and mythology and value system can be seen. Gita Mehta’s selection of India theme is her realization that the key to happiness in human life lies in understanding Indian heritage in true sense.

In Gita Mehta’s novel *A River Sutra* she has sketched many characters, the narrator who has given up civil servants job and becomes a manager of a government rest house, which is on the banks of River Narmada. This escape from the world did not stop the world coming to him. This partial turning back from the world is by his own choice, may be the one of the stages of four ashram’s in Hindu Dharma – Vanaprastha Ashram. Since it would have been difficult for him to lead the ascetic life in jungle surviving on fruits, roots and herbs, instead he picks up a job by the side of Narmada believing that he would be able to understand the world, following the belief that it has healing qualities. This implies that through narrator Gita Mehta is trying convey the message to the
world that Dharma in India does not lead to passivism. Instead, following the path of renunciation and asceticism leads people to live a more comprehensive life. While mentioning about Narmada she says in River Sutra: “...epileptics, depressives and other unfortunates rush to her banks. (ARS 147).

Further she says bathing in the water of the Jamuna: “...purifies a man in seven days, in the waters of the Ganga in one but, the Narmada purifies with a single sight of her waters. (ARS 155).

Gita Mehta has seen the parched civilization of the west-suffering, while staying in the United States. She also has seen how people are estranged nothing with each other but also with themselves. The western society struck with violence, depressions, greed lust, offers very less hope for peace for the ones who have followed the path of devastation. By intention she narrates the therapeutic quality of river Narmada that does not differentiate between good and evil, virtuous and sinner, in cutting them of their ills: “You remove the stairs of evil... Bards and ascetics sing your wonders Gamblers, cheats and dancers praise you. We all find refuge in your embrace, O holy Narmada”. (ARS 263)

The compassionate power of Narmada does not allow anyone to become without hope and be desperate that one cannot retrace his path once wrongly chosen. Through the image of Narmada she tacitly says that all hope lies in seeking solitariness and introspecting in the lap of Prakriti (nature) and correcting one’s of one ill. This tacit suggestion is in a way a reply to the western prejudice that Vanaprashtha system in India is an escapist attitude leaving an individual to a life of a recluse – a dead wood. Geeta Mehta also becomes a mouthpiece of Indian value system which aspires on achieving perfection at various stages of life.
Gita Mehta through one of the stories of Shiva disciple the Naga Baba, who did just that: You cannot become a Naga without overcoming human limitations his teacher had said. (ARS 227), Thus:

At the academy he had learned the arts of a protector Sadhu… to wield his iron trident as a weapon. He had performed yogi contortions to gain physical process for exceeding any wrestlers, hardened his hands and his feet so they could kill a man with a single blow… (ARS 230)

Gita Mehta has a design in picking up a Naga Baba character. Through him she unfolds the story of a sect of ascetic who are naked, ash covered, matted locks can given up their asceticism and come down to the worldly plane in fighting for the national cause. She narrates:

...that during the Indian Mutiny twenty thousand Naga ascetics naked and ash covered with matted locks had come down from their caves in the Himalayas to do battle with the red-coated Englishmen ambitious for empire. (ARS 229)

This Indian asceticism is multidimensional from worldly to spiritual. These Nagas are embodiment of acceptance-acceptance of everything in this world. She says: Naga Baba, on the Night of Death, visits a cemetery also the homes of untouchables and describes the Tantric Practice. (ARS 228-234)

The actions of the Naga Baba symbolize the breaking away of all attachment with the world and intentionally crossing the social norms of cleanliness and morality. This beads in breaking the barrier between good and
evil pious and impious, holy and unholy. What is that un-holy becomes holy and holy becomes unholy. Thus Naga Baba stands for acceptance of the world in totality a wider and comprehensive outlook of life.

Gita Mehta brings an element of surprise when in the end the Naga Baba resumes the worldly life as the Professor of Archaeology whose mission was to write an authentic book of Narmada. The Professor says that mythology is:

...a waste of time and if anything is sacred about this river, it is the individual experience of human beings who have lived here. (ARS. 253)

Thus Gita Mehta highlights the fact that Indian religious way of life is not a passive submission to dictatorial dogmas and ideas. Rather it is about the individual experience of human being who have lived it. Through the character of Naga Baba she has brought before the readers, the immense goodness that asceticism can bring forth which starts from self realization to curing social ills like untouchability and discriminating of good and evil, pious or impious, infusing sprit of nationalism. She defines that retirement from worldly life is to go through the process of realization and in the end come out jubilant in giving direction to the worldly life. The Professor in the end says that mythology is a waste of time and emphasizes on individual human experience.

Gita Mehta seems to take readers through various destinations of human life. There is inclusion of the story of Shiva and Kama where Kama is:

...reduced to ashes' by Shiva’s third eye. (ARS 92).
She also touches two areas of Kama Sutra where Vatsayan tells: ...that a courtesan must be a mistress of ‘sixty-four arts’. (ARS 156).

She has made an in-depth study of Indian history, mythology and has found the vital force ‘Kama’ has been treated with reverence from Pre-Aryan to the times of Aryans. The reference of the river is as divine: ...greatest than all Gods combined. (ARS 136) ...to the ‘profound respect for nature and the interdependence of life’. (ARS 147)

This gets more explicit when in an interview with C.J.S. Walia for India Star Preview of Books, when asked if A River Sutra reflects her predilections of an exquisite expression of secular-humanist philosophy and influence of Zen Budhism, Gita Mehta said:

“It does. It does. I could quote Chandidas, the great Hindus mystic poet. The river in the novel is holy to Lord Shiva, who could be described as a great humanist god of the arts, beyond gender. The humanist tradition is native to India. Zen Buddhist thinking comes, as you know, from the Indian “Dhyana”. Zen is corruption of the term “Dhayan”, which means awareness. I am very happy with your characterization. But you know, funnily enough, these constructs I can see only after writing the book. It’s such funny book it seemed to write itself. I don’t know whether it was because I had the good fortune of sitting on the banks of a river. Later, when I was in Varanasi, talked with a Professor of Sanskrit at the Hindu University. I told him I had put the narrator in the novel later. I was
trying to bring mythological time, historical time, contemporary time
and narrative time – all into say one paragraph. And he said that,
you know the “Sutra Dhar” of Classical Sanskrit drama was
precisely, for this. Just sheer chance”. (file:///llb.../India Star Review
of Books – Gita Mehta – an interview by C.J.S. Walia)

Thus Gita Mehta correlates Shiva the divine with all that is human
qualities and creator of art and music and dance of divine origin:

The six mighty ragas, the pillars of all music were born from
expressions of Shiva’s face and through their vibrations the
universe was brought into existence… but they are all male… so
each of the six ragas was given six wives, six raginis. Their
children are the putras (sons) and in this way music lives and
multiplies. (ARS 195-196)

Each raga can be mastered as invoking the Goddess of the raga.

Time and again Gita Mehta lauds Indian religion and philosophy where
Shiva the embodiment of Nirakar Brahma becomes Sakar a giver of music and
dance, to the world : “This has been worked with perfection that these ragas
evokes emotions particular to a season or part of the day”. (ARS 196)

She brings out the significance of ‘Om’ the ‘Brahma Naad’ source of all
creation from which new sounds are created : “Om is the three worlds… the
three fires, and the three Gods, Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva”. (ARS 188)

Gita Mehta tries to break the myth prevalent in the west that anything
related to Indian religion and philosophy is regressive and promotes passivism,
as it overlooks the physical existence and advocates of living in fantasy of spiritualism. Contradicting thus she says, that through spiritual exercises one can have a better understanding of this world.

In *A River Sutra*, there are characters like Tariq Mia who is an Imam in a mosque. Tariq Mia and the narrator are friends and for Tariq Mia religion is more of encumbering the world rather than escaping from it. Tariq Mia is influenced by Kabir—who had no discrimination of caste creed and religion, rather and his works are binding force as they brought together both Hindus and Muslims commenting on Kabir, Tariq Mia says: Whose poems made a bridge between your faith and mine. (Hindu & Muslim). (ARS 44)

Tariq Mia, a Muslim follows Sufi cult a cult that looks at oneself as the beloved of the almighty, the lover. Tariq Mia has realized that there is only one secret of human life and that is man’s tremendous capacity to love, which is a prime moving force. Tariq Mia says the only secret is: capacity to love (RS 45).

Gita Mehta also projects the cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims where Muslim Nawabs are shown exhibiting respect for Narmada the holy river of Hindus. This mutual respect for each other’s religion can be seen in the relationship of the narrator and Tariq Mia.

Gita Mehta has explored India and with pride wants to divulge to the world that people here are not contented with just one truth. They are the ones who have shown the world of presence of multiple truths or multiple views, and accepting diverse ideas with respect for each faith. This is the highest virtue which any society or nation can aspire for. A society opens to ideas and discussions – the highest ideal of any civilization democracy. Tariq Mia is not
happy when he says that Hindus have their greed in: ...greed with... many-headed gods and – many headed arguments. (ARS 12).

This clearly acknowledges the fact that Hinduism accepts diversity and plurality. These diverse and plural characteristics are exhibited in the characters of Tariq Mia, Jain Monk, Sufi Songs and singers and in the narrator himself.

Thus we can see Gita Mehta glorifying India in *A River Sutra*, where India stands for secular humanistic philosophy at the end.

Gita Mehta makes the reader see modern India through her eyes, while she also explores India along with her reader. What impresses a one the most about Gita Mehta, is that through her stories she defines people, places, traditions, ideas which modern India is made up of. She does exert her authority as an expert on India in narrating about India.

Gita Mehta through *A River Sutra* which was written fourteen years after her first novel has tried to reestablish the cherished position which India once occupied as Vishwa Guru. To the baffled modern day civilization, especially occidentalists, she has tried to provide answers of life and about death. The gurus of *A River Sutra* are opposed to the gurus in *Karma Cola Marketing the Mystic East Marketing the Mystic East*, in their resolve, knowledge, self-realization, compassion, love and understanding of life. Thus by picking up characters that are profound and with illumined minds she says that religion is not about running away from life and to get established in seeking salvation or God. The fountain head is in one’s heart. This gets out wordily manifested in Ragas. The ultimate source of life is love and one should try live life with love flowing from within. Prof. Shankar, Tariq Mia and Master Mohan are the ones
who have realized this sacred truth. That is what is one is supposed to do and which is the solution all the modern day ills. This had been observed that the major concern of an expatriate writer is to present an overall picture of the country which should be taken as the most realistic one.

The expatriate novelist is disinterested only is those issues which would be helpful in satiating his nostalgic thirst or that could draw readers from all over the world towards his work so that he becomes the true interpreter of a nation and its people. However realistic he may try to pose but his inability to understand native character and culture and his obsession with one and detestation for the other makes him fall short of authenticity. There have been very few expatriates writers who left India after independence or the ones who came to India as expatriates, were well versed in Indian culture, literature and art. Amongst the ones who came to India is a name Sir William Jones who understands India in true sense and spent his entire life in clearing the cobwebs that projected the mutilated pictures of India its civilization and philosophy.

There were many writers abroad who had a better understanding of Indian philosophy and culture yet that did not include it in their creative writing. There were many British expatriate writers who came to India but they rejected India theme. Although the British ruled India for more then one century and stayed here for more than two centuries, did not work for a cultural assimilation especially in a country which assimilated and mingled in itself as many cultures of races which it came in contact with. The two religions Hindu and Muslim practiced their own faith and yet respected each others religion. The British refrained from mixing with Indians and adopted the policy of fragmenting India
and its people on the line of caste, creed and religion. This was done to safeguard their imperial interest. The Britishers prompted these divisions of the society to maintain their traditions so that conservatism prevails in the society, facilitating them to rule the country with ease. Their superior ruling class complex made them maintain distance from the natives. Their theory of separatism intensified the Hindu-Muslim divide, the upper class lower class clashes, which remain the major concern even in modern day India. Ever the years the expatriate writers have concentrated their creativity on these issues. They have tried to raise their concerns over the cause, nature and consequence of religious, caste dichotomies raising significant question on political, social and cultural levels.

Years of subjugation and the British separation theory brought out the weakness of India more conspicuously. Thus the image India was painted as shattered, gloomy and a race incompetent to govern themselves. The writers added to this construct and writers like Rudyard Kipling writes in *The Power of Darkness Range* in *In the House of Suddhoo*:

> A stone’s throw out on either hand
> From that well-ordered road we tread,
> And all the world is wild and strange,
> Church and ghoul and Djinn and sprite
> Shall bear us company tonight,
> For we have reached the Oldest land. (ITHOS 108)

Thus India emerges as a wild, superstitious and primitive.

In another poem *The White Man’s Burden* Rudyard Kipling, in *A Choice of Kipling’s Works* writes:
Take up the white man’s burden-
Send forth the best ye breed-
bo bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild-
You new caught sullen peoples.
Half devil and half child. (TWMB 138)

Such pieces of literature can only depict the superiority of the British and their pride in being the strong ruling white race, entrusted with the duty to rule the people who were half-devil and half child. They looked down upon Indians as primitive, indifferent to human feelings – cruel and morally and culturally regressive – all these traits were dealt by the European writers, with great interest. This was in pursuance of their ideology that the Britishers are the chosen one to rule, as they were gifted with qualities of strength, justice, kindness, courage, virtue to rule over the one’s devoid of all these.

However there are few writers who have been able to pick out the strengths in Indian philosophy and religion, which provides continuity to human life. One amongst them is E M Forester, who designates India as the holder of secret in rendering order to the modern day chaotic world. This strength of India as a nation lies in his realization that loves or Bhakti can the doors for tormented, tortured, divided and grief stricken individuals. Forster attributes this is to the all inclusive and all embracing spirit of Hinduism in his A Passage to India. Forster while justifying this had said : this in his article the Mission of Hinduism in The Daily News and Leader, 13 April 1915 :
It is true that Hinduism emphasizes the other side of the human paradox – the fact that we are all the same… stripped of its local trappings, of its hundred handed gods, and monkeys and bulls and snakes and twice born, it preaches with intense conviction and passion the doctrine of unity. (TMOH 7)

Forster was very much impressed with the binding quality that Hinduism possesses. It is this acceptance of all faiths, and the realization the power of love, which has made India to live for centuries together while other nations have come and gone in the pages of history. These most important traits of India and Hinduism are found missing in the western world. Even these religions have not permitted their practitioners to show such generosity and large heartedness.

There are certain inherent weaknesses in Hinduism like vagueness, irrationality, superstition which makes it problematic. But what makes it bigger is the sense of including every aspect of life. What makes it contradictory also makes it plausible which is to accommodate diverse opinions, ideas and faiths. The Hinduism shows respect for all creatures, whether they are men, birds, animals, serpents, fish, who are deified and worshipped since ages E.M. Forster while incorporating the incident of Gokul Ashtami, in his *A Passage to India* indicates at the gap in Christianity. There is a lamentation in his narration in *The Hill of Devi* that: Canonical gospels do not record that Christ laughed and played. Can a man be perfect if he never laughs or plays?” Further, he says “Krishna’s jokes may be vapid but they bridge a gap. (THOD 117)

Thus Foster breaks away from the coterie of writers given to paint a dismal and gloomy picture of India.
Tragically India bore the brutal blows of partition of India and Pakistan. Other than tackling a newly freed state with fractured identities it had to accommodate an inflow of immigrants from Pakistan. More so ever British had inflicted several wounds in the cultural fabric of the nation. Then there was a new generation, who was not ready to accept anything from the India of yester years. This was the result of being brought and educated in western style. There were collisions between the newly generated thoughts and ideas with materialism at the core a yearning for individualism and the collective consciousness of tradition bound society with community. This clash resulted in the evasion of traditional values.

The expatriate writers have thus tried to explore these dichotomies and the assimilations that resolve them at times, against a background of an India struggling to find her feet. Their contribution is significant to the tradition with which they try to identify themselves.

By singing the theme of glory of India the expatriate writers want to sell to the world that India possess a lot to offer to the world and which even can be a panacea to all the ills.