(1) Introduction:

‘A River Sutra’ begins with the epigraph. ‘Listen, O brother./Man is the greatest truth./Nothing beyond.’ This metaphysical view represents the nature of man and the reality of his existence in this temporal world. Mehta’s characters seem to make attempt to discover and interiorize the truth of their existence in their own unique way. The very basic strength of the novel is the pluralistic approach that Gita
Mehta has been able to achieve. The narrator and Tariq Mia, the mullah of the village mosque, who is called “the wisest of all my (narrator’s) friends”\(^1\) provides the connecting stories. A bureaucrat sets out to the sacred river, the Narmada, as a manager of a small guest house. He is the narrator, the sutradhar who recounts the stories told by strangers to him. He comes to the banks of the Narmada in search of peace and harmony but he confronts the powers of mythology, religion, music and philosophy. There are six stories: “The Monk’s”, “The Musician’s”, “The teacher’s”, The executive’s,” “The Courtesan’s and “The Minstrel’s.” These stories depict complexity as well as the paradox of human emotions. They represent various aspect of tradition and modernity, prevailing in our society.

\(\text{(2) Tradition:-}\)

The novel is the most powerful form of literary expression and it has acquired a prestigious position in Indian-English literature. It is commonly accepted that the novel is the readiest and most significant way of revealing experiences and ideas in the context of our time. “Indian creative writers in English have been attracted to and adopted this form generously and skillfully.”\(^2\) Indian fiction in English after establishing its foothold in Common Wealth literature, is now producing third generation novelists. In the present phenomenon, we find the quick change in our social, cultural and moral norms of the society. Gita Mehta, in her novel ‘A River Sutra’, explores the vital areas of individual consciousness and has projected the charming images of cultural change rather transformation. Actually literature, in any form, is a record of what men have seen, experience, thought and felt in life. “It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language.”\(^3\) While portraying women, women novelists provide prominent place to the theme of conflict between tradition and modernity. Gita Mehta also presents the theme of tradition and modernity making struggle at different places. A few of her characters have faith in traditional thoughts while others are grounded in modern ideas and
attitude. She represents some characters who believe that in spite of being rooted in tradition, one may be modern.

**Significance of Rivers:** The novel *A River Sutra* has been set on the banks of India’s holiest river—The Narmada where one can find the traffic of pilgrims, archeologists, policemen, priests and traders. In each of the six stories, the point of concentration is the theme of survival. The narrator narrates the dangerous lives of characters to his assistant Chagla, his friend and eighty years old mullah, Tariqu Mia and Dr. Mitra, a local doctor. The characters of the novel assemble near the banks of the Narmada to attain renunciation and tranquility. The narrator’s bungalow was situated at the bank of the river. Its “proximity to the Narmada river was its particular attraction”\(^4\) and the solitary lights of his bungalow shone like a light house in the blackness of the jungles, inviting the narrator to return and consider what he had learned. The central figure of the novel does not have a child and his wife having died, he comes to the Narmada rest house in search of tranquility. It is interesting that skeptical pseudo-scientist like Dr. Mira enjoys the tales, occurred at the banks of this astonishing river which unravel the threads of mythology, archeology and anthropology. About the pilgrims of the stories, Tariq Mia says, “Such people are like water flowing through our lives... we learn something from the encounter, then they are gone.”\(^5\) It is the treatment of the Narmada river which is responsible for the background to all the tales. Rivers have a particular significance in the Indian peoples mind. K.R.S. Iyengar points out that the river stirs attachment almost personal. He further says, “The river in India is a feminine power and personality and the land must woo her and deserve her love if their hopes of fruitfulness and security are to be realised.”\(^6\) Mythologically, the Narmada is regarded as the holiest river of India, “Bathing in the waters of the Saraswati in three, in the waters of the Ganga in one, but the Narmada purifies with the single sight of her waters.”\(^7\) One of the Narmada’s fifteen names is Vipasa which means that which liberates from
sorrows and pains. “Narmada sarvatah punya brahmahatyapaharini”⁸ Prof. Shankar tells : “The Narmada has never changed its course. What we are seeing today is the same river that was seen by the people who lived here a hundred thousand years ago. To me such a sustained record of human presence in the same place—that is immorality.”⁹ “Rivers are regarded with love and reverence and figure prominently in the epic and folk literature of Indians.”¹⁰ Michael Parfit comments for Gila river, “Love this river, stay by it, learn from it.”¹¹ On the banks of the Narmada, we find monks and ascetics, courtesans and bandits, music teachers and their prodigies, minstrels and Naga Babas, scientists and astrologers. Each of them comes here hoping to find a panacea for the malady that afflicts them. In the novel, the question arises whether rivers have really the power to change the lives of the hopefuls. The narrator has come to the banks of the Narmada with one question, “Can the river give me what I am searching for?” The narrator is a childless widower, and elderly bureaucrat. His parents are dead and he knows that his cronies at work will hardly miss him when he leaves for his new posting. Novels set on the banks of a river are not new to Indian literature. According to Nirad C. Chaudhari, the river cult is a pre-Aryan belief brought from the banks of the Danube. The river in India is a feminine power and a personality that can be wooed. In the novel, the river Narmada serves as a connecting thread. According to Geeta Doctor, “The covers of the novel depicts a brilliant pink river of cloth, wrung out and twisted like the banks of fabric... It’s rich and remote and sensual, the river as a thread, the sutra, or thread, or string... as a river. And Mehta as a modern Indian Sheherazade is weaving these into a limpid stream of stories.”¹²

The source of the Narmada is Amarkantak and its mouth is in the Arabian sea. On its banks, we find so many religious people who come here to get renunciation. “At the mouth of the river on the Arabian Sea, the pilgrims must don white clothing out of respect for Shiva’s asceticism before walking eight hundred Kilometers to the
Rivers are the source of inspiration for many of our patriots. Sri Aurobindo expresses in his poem:

"Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the, flowers of Eden blow."

According to a couplet in the Mahabharata, one is not rooted in a landscape. One is “more like a river, ever flowing, ever changing, ever renewing itself and always moving to join the indivisible ocean.” According to Indian mythology, the purpose of pilgrimage is endurance. With the help of endurance, one can be linked to the energy of the universe. So Narmada has power to link someone to the power of Shiva because “Narmada River is thought to link mankind to the energy of Shiva.” The river is “an ambivalent symbol since it corresponds to the creative power both of nature and of time.” Most of the pilgrimages in India are found at the banks of holy rivers. The Narmada, the holiest river of India, is worshipped as a goddess. “The river is among our holiest pilgrimage sites, worshiped as the daughter of the god Shiva.” In India someone usually makes a temple if he feels mentally or physically upset by unavoidable agony and later on, it becomes a pilgrimage. “Someone is sure to commemorate Nitin Bose’s recovery by building a temple where he immersed the idol. It will become a place of pilgrimage, attracting hosts of lunatics to your riverbank.” According to a belief, one can be free from one’s sins if he dies in the Narmada. So in many cases people were found making a suicide in the Narmada. “Only that she was happy her daughter had died in the Narmada because she would be purified of all her sins.” By committing suicide in the Narmada, one can gain release from the rebirth. Dr. Mitra comments, “I suppose, even the Greeks and the Alexandrianes had heard about the Narmada’s holiness and the religious suicide at Amarkantak—people fating to death or immolating
themselves on the Narmada’s banks, or drowning in her waters—in order to gain release from the cycle of birth and rebirth.”

Replying the question of Dr. Mitra, the constable narrates, “We found him standing on the very edge of cliff, staring down into the Narmada.” At the gruesome death of Imrat, Master Mohan comes to the banks of Narmada “and commits suicide because he could not exist without loving some one.”

When Nitin Bose, an executive, lost his mental balance after falling in love with a tribal girl, Rima, he is suggested to “worship the goddess at any shrine that overlooks the Narmada river. Only that river has been given the power to cure.” When the disciple of the music teacher did not fulfill his promise to marry his daughter, she was brought to the river banks and was advised by his father to meditate and become a ragini to every raga. But his daughter considers it impossible and questions. “Do you think it can be done? Do you think this river has such power?”

Describing the virtue of Narmada, the minstrel sings:

“You remove the stains of evil.
You release the wheel of suffering.
You lift the burdens of the world.
‘O’ holy Narmada.”

When Nitin Bose, separated from Rima, becomes a tormented soul, he takes refuge on the banks of the Narmada as if “only that river has been given the power to cure him.” The river is always near the characters of the stories they narrate. In the novel, Narmada is represented as a beautiful woman. Like “a beautiful woman dancing towards the Arabian sea…the spraying waterfalls retracing the first rays of the sun into arcs of color as if the river were a woman adorning herself with jewels.” The Narmada was the holiest pilgrimage site in India. It purifies a man from all the sins. “A mere glimpse of Narmada’s water is supposed to cleanse a himan being of generations of sinful.” Commenting on Prof. Shankar’s disbelief,
Dr. Mitra argues, “After all, the Narmada is the holiest river in India, as our host would be the first to tell us.”

According to a legend, there are numerous religious places at the banks of Narmada. When prof. Shankar calls Narmada a whore, Dr. Mitra comments: “The Narmada is already too holy by half. Do you know how many sacred spots are supposed to be on her banks. Four hundred billion, according to the Puranic scripture.”

In ‘Karma Cola, Gita Mehta says about Benares, “It is the city on the banks of the river Ganges at its most holy confluence.”

The banks of the Narmada are crowded with priests, astrologers, beggars, holy men, vendors etc. Gita Mehta presents the religious places at its banks: “Beggars and holy men, priests instructing the devout on how to make their obeisance to the river. Horoscope readers and palmists… Women after their ritual baths… pilgrims pouring oil into clay lamps to float on the river.”

At the banks of the Narmada, the chief narrator meets old mullah of the village masque, his assistant Mr. Chagla, monks, ascetics, courtesans, bandits, music teacher, minstrel, musician, Naga Baba, scientist and astrologers. The chief narrator, the bureaucrat is “like a screen or could it be a semitransparent envelop which contains or mirrors the pageant of impressions that he seems to elicit in his chance encounters with the people he meets.”

Mr. Chagla, on the terrace, is unable to watch the Narmada due to darkness and meditates over it. He asks, “Did they brood on the Narmada as the proof of Shiva’s great penance or did they imagine her as a beautiful woman dancing toward the Arabian Sea, arousing the lust of ascetics.”

The music teacher’s daughter narrates her father’s advice. “He says that I must meditate on the waters of the Narmada, the symbol of Shiva’s penance.” “The Minstrel’s Story” is the most interesting and mystifying one. It is about a Naga Baba who saves a girl from the clutches of a prostitute. He takes the child with him, meditates in a cave, makes the girl sing in the praise of Narmada, consequently a minstrel is born. When mullah of the mosque asked Naga Baba what he was teaching the child, he replied, “Shankarcharya’s poem to the
Narmada.” Hearing the explanation, mullah felt as if he were flowing in the rhythms of the poem. K.R.S. Iyengar points out that rivers are regarded with veneration by writers like kabir, Rao and Narayan. “Novels with a river background are K.S. Venkataramani’s Murugan the Tiller (1927). Humayun Kabir’s Men and Rivers (1945)… and of course R.K. Narayan’s novels centred in Malgudion-Saryu. In Raja Rao’s Kanthapura…and the Serpent and the Rope.” The Revakhandha of the Skandapurana writes the following about the origin of the Narmada:

“Pura Shivah santatanus cacara vipulan tapah/
Hitarkha sarvalokanam Umaya saha Sankarah/
Riksasaile samaruhya tapas tepe suarunam/
Tasmad asit samudhhuta mahapunya saridvara
Ya sa tvaya mave drsta padmapatrayateksana”\textsuperscript{36}

The Narmada seems to be broad bosomed when it proceeds towards the Arabian sea. “I can watch the river broadening as it races towards the Arabian Sea to become seventeen kilometers wide at its delta.”\textsuperscript{37} Prof. Shankar comments: “the Narmada is what we call a degrading river. It has a very fast current, which erodes the riverbed, cutting deeper and deeper into the rock.”\textsuperscript{38} God Shiva blessed the Narmada to be the holiest river for ever and then “he gave her in marriage to the ocean, Lord of Rivers, most lustrous of all her suitors.”\textsuperscript{39} Gita Mehta represents the Narmada as an immortal creation because it was present at the time of Creation and it will remain at the time of destruction. “You were present at the Creation/By Shiva’s command you alone will remain/ at the Destruction.”\textsuperscript{40} Prof Shankar who became Naga Baba, claimed to love the Narmada not because of its holiness but its immortality. He says, “I mean immortality in its most literal sense. So much so the Hindu calendar is different on either bank of the Narmada. Just think Thousands of
years ago the sage Vyasa dictated the Mahabharata on this riverbank.”

Mythologically Mehta contemplates the river thus: “It is said that Shiva, Creator and Destroyer of worlds, was in an ascetic trances so strenuous that rivulets of perspiration began flowing from his body down the hills. The stream took the form of a woman… Her inventive variations so amused Shiva that he named her Narmada, the Delightful one.”

Minstrel Uma sings, “But Shiva called you/Delight/And laughing/Named you Narmada.” According to mythological belief, the Narmada was twice born. Minstrel Uma further sings, “The sages meditating on your riverbanks say/you are twice-born/Once from penance/Once from love. Then he changed you into a river/To cool the lust of holy men/And called you Narmada/Soother of Desires/Even Shiva’s semen/Is cooled to stone in your riverbed/Each seed becoming/An idol wrested from your blue-black waters.”

Dr. Mitra asks the narrator: “Did you know Narmada means whore in Sanskrit?” The translation is incorrect but it indicates the novelist’s eagerness to present the Narmada as a temptress. The following verse by Shankaracharya is also indicative of the same attitude:

Looking from his inward contemplation
To watch you The Destroyer said,
O damsel of the beautiful hips,
Evoker of Narma, Lust,
Be Known as Narmada
Holiest of rivers.”

Kalidasa asks who can bear to leave you?
For who can bear to leave
a woman, her loins bared.
Having once seen the sweetness of her body.”

All these details help the novelist present the Narmada in different but refined colours to suit her purpose of evoking the feminine force in the novel effectively. The Narmada is depicted as a beautiful women who is capable to stir the ascetics. “From water you became a woman/So beautiful that gods and ascetics/Their loins hard with desire/Abandoned their contemplations/To pursue you.”

According to mythological belief, the Narmada is capable to relieve us from suffering and rebirth. Minstrel Uma sings. “The sages have said/who ever praises you/At dawn, at dusk, at night/…Approach with honour/The feet of Shiva Himself.” Our mythology says that only God Shiva has the power of destruction. At the time of destruction the Narmada will give instruction. “The time of great destruction is here/while the Destroyer dance/All will be destroyed/I and I alone am sanctuary/…I will lead you to the next Creation.”

In the Indian context, Time is the goddess Kali, A destroyer “devouring the life she has produced and in her dual aspect she holds the symbols both of death and immortality. In fact the Narmada is represented as the symbol of immortal creation. The only God who can not be destroyed by Time is Lord Shiva, who, by his five dance steps, represents creation, preservation, destruction, reincarnation and ultimate release.”

Varnashram System:- In ancient India, our life was divided in four ashrams—Brahmacharya, Grihasth, Vanaprasth and Sanyas. In Vanaprastha ashram, one had to go to forest to contemplate. In the novel A River Sutra, the narrator, a senior bureaucrat decides to lead the life of a vanaprasthi or “someone who has retired to the forest to reflect” after fulfilling his worldly obligations. The narrator himself says, “My wife was barren so I had no children to concern themselves with my decision. My parents are no longer alive, nor my wife, and my associates hardly noticed the moment of my departure.” A similar case has been portrayed by Tulsidas: Nari Mui ghar sampatianasa/Muda mudai bhaye sanyasi.” The narrator’s
idea of renunciation grew stronger when he saw his colleagues succumb to corruption. But renunciation has not been presented by the novelist as the solution to life’s problems. The novel affirms faith in dedication rather than alienation and survival rather than renunciation. Talking about his previous life, the monk tells the narrator: “At the age of twenty six I had already become fatigued by the world knowing that even at the moment of gratification, the seed of new desire was being sown.”52 Anita Desai represents that Jagan and Nanda Kaul invoke their age and the idea of the four ashramas (life phase) as justification for their distancing themselves from the problems of worldly existence.”53 Having fulfilled the worldly obligation, one was to set out in the forest to get enlightenment. The monk reveals, “Many are like myself, quite elderly persons who have completed the first stage of life prescribed by our Hindu scriptures—the infant, the student, the house holder—and who have now entered the stage of the vanaprasthi, to seek personal enlightenment.”54 In the novel, Gita Mehta wants to attack on the hypocrisy of renunciation. She seems to indicate that renunciation from one’s worldly duties is not the highest attainment that one can strive for and be proud of when you know so little of it?” But the narrator has often been of the view that the banks of Narmada are a perfect retreat for anyone like him wishing to withdraw from the world. According to Hindu scripture, enlightenment is the ultimate goal of human life. Lila narrates the message described by Mataji about swarga. “It is a very nice place, the weather is very pleasant... If you get what I mean, sometimes a mango, sometimes mithai.”55

Mendicants: In the novel, the attitude and action of Naga ascetics is somewhat different. During the first war of Indian Independence, the twenty thousand Nagas residing in the caves of Himalaya, came forward to fight. “Twenty thousand Naga ascetics, naked, ash-covered with matted locks, had come down... to do battle with the red-coated Englishmen.”56 The Naga ascetics smeared ash over their bodies as the symbol of their ascetic race but Gita Mehta tries to seek its
scientific influence. The Naga Baba “smeared all over his body, an antiseptic and an insulation against heat and cold. When he rubbed the mixture on her arms, she found mosquitoes never bit her.” 57 According to mythological description, the Naga Baba had only half part of the food. The girl child saw “the Naga Baba separate the food into four equal portions—one to be kept aside for the animals, one for any stranger who might need a meal, saving only the remaining two portions for the himself.” 58 The narrator, as an ascetic fancies about other ascetics clad in the traditional dress. He imagines “the ascetics sitting in the darkness like myself, their naked bodies smeared in ash, their matted hair wound on top of their heads in imitation of their ascetic god witnessing the river’s birth as they chant: “Shiva-o-ham/I that am Shiva, Shiva am I.” 59 The Jain mendicants are almost naked and deprived of shame. While meditation, they only give signal and do not speak. Once the narrator “met two naked Jain mendicants, members of the Sky Clad sect whose rigorous penances include the denial of human shame.” 60 Gita Mehta attacks the Jain monks who renounce the world because she is in the favour of fulfilling the worldly obligations. Once the narrator met a monk who was going to join his fellow Jain monks in order to have their heads shaved. The Jain monk told that he was going to do it “to avoid human vanity.” A naga has to overcome human limitation and has to learn to survive without water. He applies ash to make his skin grey. He used “the human skull from which he ate and drank... he possessed superhuman powers, the ability to levitate and to place irrevocable curses on any who displeased him.” 61 They chant to please the God Shiva at the funeral pyre and smear the ash of pyre over body. “Crossing his legs in the lotus position, the Naga Baba placed his hands on his knees and began to chant he would continue for nine days and nine nights by the funeral pyre: “Shiva-o-ham/I that am Shiva/Shiva-o-ham/Shiva am I.” 62 Actually human life is itself a funeral procession winding towards the grave/Its small joys the flowers of funeral wreaths.” 63 At the banks of Narmada, one can find
ascetics meditating in order to liberate themselves from rebirth. The narrator very often finds ascetics meditating by the holy pool at Amarkantak, seeking through their meditations to liberate themselves from the cycle of rebirth and death.” The Jain monk criticises the Hindus having faith in many headed gods. At the question of enlightenment, the Jain monk comments: “You Hindus, always disguising your greed with your many headed gods and your many headed arguments.” In the Vedic discourse, the gods are many and the greater ones were regarded by turn as supreme. Rigveda says, “Thou at birth, oh! Agni, are Varuna: When Kindled, thou dost become Mitra, in thee oh! Son of strength all gods are centred, to the worshipper thou dost become Indra.” A Jain monk is always cautious of nonviolence. He cares even invisible germs not to be killed. For this purpose he always wears a boulder. “For several minutes he (the Jain monk) carefully brushed the boulder free of insects. Satisfied at last that he would be harming no living creature to my delight he climbed up beside me.” The Jain monk reiterates that giving up the world is not the sacrifice for him. Enlightenment is the chief goal of human life. For it, one should be free from ego because ego checks everyone to reach the atman. The Jain Monk narrates his renunciation ceremony when he had to begun fast. He says. “This morning I took my last meal with my family although I was not hungry, unable to ignore the tears falling from my wife’s eyes... only then will I be permitted to walk the streets of the city, begging my food and drink.” When the monk was asked what he was doing there on the cliff, he only said, “Bring me my oil and my collyrium. Sister, bring the mirror and my vermillion.” In the novel we are introduced the tomb of the Sufi poet and saint Amir Rumi where Sufi singers from all over India converge to pay homage to their saints on the anniversary of his death. “For ten days and nights the marble platforms are covered with carpets, campfires flicker on the hillside, the hills echo to ecstatic singing.”
Hindu mythology insists on the idea of bondage to the feet of God but Sufi mystics have contrary idea. In ‘In an Antique Land’ “the vachanakaras the idea of merging with God would have been regarded as blasphemous by the Sufis, yet the idea of bondage to God was one of the central metaphors of religious life.”

**Places of Worship:** The novel represents the religious places including temples and mosques where people gather to worship punctually. People of our country are deeply grounded in religious feelings. Their background stimulates them to attend daily prayer in temples and mosques. The narrator says, “Below Rudra, visible from our terrace at the bend of the river, sprawls the temple complex of Mahadev.” In the morning, the birds began to twitter in very sweet melodious voice, hearing which the pilgrims begin their routine with morning prayer in the temple situated at the banks of river Narmada. The narrator explains, “Then streaks of pale light send clouds of noisy birds into the sky, evoking crowds of pilgrims swarming through Amarkantak’s temples for the morning worship.”

The narrator considers Tariq Mia as his wisest friend so walks to the mosque to meet him. “Beyond the valley on the next range of hills is a Muslim village with a small mosque adjoining the tomb of Amir Rumi, a Sufi saint of the sixteenth century.” While performing worship, the pilgrims make their offerings to the idols, ring bells, provide something to the beggars.

**The narrator describes:** “Above the steps the temples rise like a city, their forecourts crowded with families entering the sculpted stone arches... the families descend to place sweets in front of the beggars and holy men sitting on the steps.” The pilgrims float the burning lamps of clay on the water of the Narmada. Sometimes the narrator sat “watching the distant silhouettes of the pilgrims floating their lamps on the water at Mahadeo, moving like ants up and down the temple steps.” We find the temples of God Shiva in majority at the banks the Narmada because this holiest river is the product of Shiva’s penance. In ‘A Rudrakasha Rosary, Shiva is presented
birthless and deathless. According to ‘Shiva Purana’, “Lord Shiva comes down to
the earth to mediate between Brahma and Vishnu in their quarrel.” Hinduism
suggests to bath regularly and to give shower to gods as well but Christianity has
different belief. “Christians on the other hand did not think that salvation and bathing
were casually related.” The devotees goes to worship in the temples of Mahadeo
in dawn and dusk both. The narrator says, “The temple bells from Mahadeo were
going on ringing for the evening prayer” so Mr. Chagla decided to leave the place
for fear of snakbite. Usually every Indian wants to begin the morning with prayer.
Women of traditional community make prayers and offer flowers to gods : “Later in
the morning more women would come and offer flowers at the sacred nick…Some
would simply bow, like Lila and say a greeting to God.” But at some places, we
find people having less faith in God. Jasmin’s unorthodoxy blazes forth: “Dida, I
said, if God sent Sukhi to kill my husband and then I renounce God, I spit on him.”

While bathing in the Narmada, the pilgrims offer water to the gods and chant
the name of God Shiva. “Below us two pilgrims were standing waist high in the dark
river, cupping water in their hands then letting it fall in a stream through their fingers
as they chanted, Om, Om, Om.” The bathers chant : “Om is three worlds./Om is
the three fires./Om is the three gods./Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva.” In ‘Jasmine’,
Mukherjee’s intention seems “to treat every second of your existence as a possible
assignment from God. Everything you do…is equally important in the eye of God.”
The old mullah often sings the Sufi songs to the narrator who enjoyed them too
much. “I never fail to be moved by the uninhibited delight in that quavering voice
as he sings his Sufi songs of love to God.” Tariq Mia describes the gloomy thoughts
about Kabir, “India’s greatest poet also floated down this river. Kabir, the man
whose poems made a bridge between your raith and mine. Meditate on Kabir’s
toothbrush. You will find it more useful than thinking about an ascetic’s corpse.”
Gita Mehta portrays the Sufi songs showing that most of the people do not seem to
have deep faith in God. “Do not reveal the Truth in a world where/blasphemy prevails./O wondrous source of mystery.”

Tariq Mia narrates that a festival is celebrated at the death anniversary of Amir Rumi, “You know how they can continue all night–nine, ten singers at a time…no longer remember fatigue in her praise of God.” The love to God may be represented as a bond between master and slave acquiring a religious and spiritual dimension. “The Vachanakara saint poets of Bomma’s community often used slavery as an image to represent the devotee’s quest for God.”

**Teaching:** Answering her father, a music teacher, the daughter says that “The heroic for the man and the erotic for the woman” are the two emotions that govern the two sexes in all music. Non-violence is the chief motto of Jainism. It does not allow the least violence that is why they cover their whole face except eyes. Jain Muni reveals, “when I was a child, my father had taught me the cardinal doctrine of the Jains. The most important thing in our faith is ahimsa, the practice of non violence.”

Indian way of life and its culture was widely appreciated all over the world. Baleshwar Agrawal comments: “In the first phase of migration, about 5000 years ago, saints and seers moved in different direction equipped with deep knowledge of philosophy. These travellers were the first ones to spread the message of Indian culture to the whole world.” The music teacher taught the origin of music. The music was created after Shiva’s dance. “There was no art until Shiva danced the creation…Music lay asleep inside a motionless rhythm deep as water, black as darkness, weightless as air. Then Shiva shook his drum. Everything started to tremble with the longing to exist…and through their vibrations the universe was brought into existence.” Legend says that Shiva, the Creator and Destroyer “was in ascetic trance so strenuous that rivulets of perspiration began flowing from his body down the hills.”
The music teacher loved Imrat too much and he used to instruct him the art of singing. “Morning after morning, they listened to the music teacher instruct Imrat in the songs of Kabir, and Mirabi, of Khusrau and Tulsidas, of Chisti and Chandidas, the wandering poets and mystics who had made India’s soul visible to herself.”

The Narmada pilgrimage was to be completed within two years. Music teacher’s daughter explains that she was not making a religious pilgrimage. She considers her musical education as a pilgrimage. The music teacher explains that the animals also respond to the beauty. “A feeding deer will drop its food to listen to music. Peacock’s cry is the first note of the scale, Sa.” While walking in the forest, the music teacher tried to teach the seven notes of the scale as described in the classic texts. He taught, “can you hear that calf calling its mother? It is the note-re” The music teacher sang the notes of the scale imitating the animals—the strutting of the peacock, the panic of a lost calf…until the nature of the notes became second nature to his pupils.

The music teacher tells that our emotions are responsible to create different ragas. “Each raga is related to a particular season, a time of day, an emotion. But emotion is the key that unlocks a raga’s soul.” He says that the music returns to the sound that is so all—encompassing it is silent, the sound we call the secret of the Gandharva Veda. According to Vedas, a man can attain salvation by playing the Veena with correct rhythm and keeping its notes and its character intact. The music teacher was always trying to make his daughter understand the link between music and the world.

Different ragas are only a skeleton of melody. When Veena is united to raga, it must speak the language of the soul. He says, “You see, a raga has its own soul. Without its soul, its raga, a raga is only a dead thing... The first sound of creation was Om.” The music teacher gave a picture to his daughter and said, “This is raga you will learn. The Bhairav, Bhairav is another name of Shiva, meaning the fire of Time.” Different ragas are sung at different time. The daughter of the music teacher tells,
“It was the hour to play the Bhairav, the raga of Shiva, when darkness turns into dawn.”

Rituals:- A Jain monk is to renounce the world to get the ultimate goal of life. He can not attain it living in the company of his family member. He has to practice endurance and penance. The narrator is explained that the Jain monk’s father spent a large amount of money at the time of his renunciation ceremony. He says, “My father boasts of spending sixty two million rupees on my renunciation ceremonies.” Dhondy represents that religion does not require money. Only sincere love for humanity is essential. “Dhondy’s misunderstanding of Buddhism is only symbolic, for misrepresentation of religion brings money to the organizer but ignorance to the follower. Propagation of religion doesn’t require money, nor anybody’s life, it requires only sincerity.” The Jain monk describes the show of money at the time of renunciation ceremonies. He says, “Today those drums are filled with cash and coins to be thrown as charity to the crowds... trying to look regal on their shifting perches.” He informs that his father wanted to make the procession as glorious as that of ‘Mahavira, the great teacher of the Jain faith.’ Mahavira abandoned the kingdom and left his gilded cage in a mighty procession. The wealth was distributed to the poor at the occasion. “Since then whenever a Jain becomes a monk... a desire to have my departure rival the splendors of the farewell of Mahavira himself.” The Jain monk’s father handed a sliver urn to him so that he may throw pearls, diamond chips, silver coins over the shifting mass of heads. According to the tradition, the Jain monk forced his way through the twisting streets towards the shop where his ancestors began their business. At the time of renunciation, the monk saw his relatives and family members weeping but their tears were only an overflow from the excitement of the day. During the ceremony, a monk has to save his head in the presence of other monks. The monk tells, “I placed my head before the barber and he starts cutting my thick hair... trying to restrain his emotion as the barber shaves
my scalp.”

At the time of renunciation ceremonies, the monk was warned for certain endurance in further life. The other monks recited the litany and the monk remembered the warning given by his father, “you will suffer pain from constant walking you will suffer loneliness. You will grieve for your children. You will be deprived of the ministrations of any woman lest she arouse your desire.”

The monk was provided a muslin mask to tie over his mouth and the three pieces of cloth for his daily use. When he saw his reflection in the mirror, he was amazed to see his scalp head with remaining five hairs. Different religion prescribes different uniform which is to be put on by the followers. Namita Gokhale describes dress of a Hindu religion. “The white dhoti and kurta of the Pandit have been shown as starched stiff as any politician’s.

During the ceremony, the monk had to pull out the hair left by the barber. Each time he wrenched his hand away from his scalp, the crowd screamed as if sharing his agony. Anees Jung narrates the daily routine of Jain Sadhvis. They were “the women with the shaven heads who move on and beg and eat their food and withdraw into the dark precincts of the ashram during the night.”

The monks encircled the new monk and no one was able to recognize him as a new monk. The monks began chanting. “You will be free from doubt. You will be free from delusion. You will be free from extremes. You will promote stability. You will protect life.” Although his father was trying to find him, he was unable to do it because his face was hidden behind a muslin mask. The monk told his previous story to the narrator but now was about to leave him because all the other monks were waiting for him. He told the narrator, “I can not stay longer. You must find someone else to answer your questions... I am too poor to renounce the world twice.”

**Superstitions:** In the novel, Gita Mehta represents some superstitions found in the society at a large scale. There are so many hypocritical beliefs which check the free development of our country. Gita Mehta attacks on these faiths and tries her
best to modify our traditions. The people residing at the banks of the Narmada and other pilgrims believe that the Narmada saves the human beings from snake’s poison. The pilgrims often recite the invocation, “Salutation in the morning and at night to thee,/O Narmada!/Defend me from the serpent’s poison.”\textsuperscript{106} Mr Chagla wants to reach home before it was dark for fear of snakebite. “Let us return to bungalow before we are eaten up by snakes.”\textsuperscript{107} The Visnupurana maintains: “Narmada namah pratar Narmadayai namo nisi/ Namo stu Naramde tubham trahi mam visasarpatah.”\textsuperscript{108} The tribals believe in evil spirits. They have a goddess who is capable to remove the effect of evil spirit: “They say there is a shrine of a goddess in these jungles. A tribal goddess, who curse the madness of those who are possessed.”\textsuperscript{109} In the play ‘Bayen’ we are introduced to a woman who says that people say “I have the evil eye. If I stare at a child, it is sure to die.”\textsuperscript{110}

When master Mohan’s voice has broken, his wife reminded him. “Your family has the evil eye. Whatever you touch is cursed, whatever you are given you lose.”\textsuperscript{111} At Sohrab’s not coming home, Miss Kutpitia asks Dilnavaz to get some nails of Tehmul to burn in coal fire and then to sprinkle turmeric and cayenne powders. This ritual “would open wide Tehmul’s Channels... through which his spirit would reach and yank the evil out of Sohrab’s brain.”\textsuperscript{112} The ayah of Tales from Ferozsha Baag always believed in ghosts, “when I was little, I saw them (ghosts) in my father’s small field in Goa... For almost a whole year the ghost slept with me every Friday night.” Father D’ Silva said, “I was blameless because it was not my wish to have the bhoot sleeping with me.”\textsuperscript{113} When Nitin Bose lost his mental balance after falling in love with a tribal girl during his stay in a tea estate, the priest of the tribal village was sent for. The priest brought a snake and held it only inches from Bose’s face but he did not wince or even blink. The priest prayed the snake drank the milk. The priest told, “Someone has taken possession of you”\textsuperscript{114} Nitin Bose was advised to do a ritual popular in the tribals. Although Nitin Bose does not have faith in goddess,
Mr Chagla says, “The goddess is just the principle of life. She is every illusion that is inspiring love... she is what a mother is feeling for a child. A man for a woman. A starving man for food. Human beings for God.”

He was advised to carry an image of the goddess to the river for immersing purpose. The Panditji exhorted the devotees at the temple to contribute to the setting up of a fitting memorial to Mataji: “Great punya will accrue to all of you who do so and Mataji’s blessing will lighten the burden of life in Kalyug.”

Nitin Bose is informed that “desire is the origin of life. For thousands of years our tribals have worshipped it as the goddess.”

The narrator watches Nitin Bose proceeding towards the river followed by a line of villagers. They were carrying the idol on a platform supported by long bamboo poles. At the river bank Nitin Bose was allowed to immerse the idol. He remembered the instruction and holding the idol, walked into the water to immerse it chanting to defend himself from snakebite. Hindu mythology says that the Narmada is capable to dispel the evil effect of Saturn, “Her holiness is believed to dispel the malevolent effects of Saturn so all manner of epileptics, depressives and other unfortunate rush to her banks.”

Dr. Mitra was informed that honeybite was very auspicious among the tribals. They believe that their ancestors are still sleeping in the dangerous forest and are immortal. He was told. “Honeybees are said to circle the immortal’s head, sahib. The bandits believe if they are stung by one of the honey bees, they can not be killed in a police shootout.”

Rahul Singh, the kidnapper told, “His men thought he was himself immortal because he had been stung by one of those bees. I wanted to be stung by such a boneybee.”

The tribal girl Rima informs Nitin Bose about the great serpent kingdom lying inches beneath the soil. She further tells that during the moon eclipse, a man’s soul could be captured inside the two halves of a coconut.

Nitin Bose could not dare to ask for the torch from the Guard because the superstitious guard would not venture out of doors on a night so full of ill omen. According to hypocritical belief, a man can become fatally ill or mad if he walks
outside during the eclipse of the moon. Gita Mehta represent the minstrel’s story in which the Naga Baba, known as Prof. Shankar in his previous life, saves a girl from prostitute and renames her Uma. Before the night of Shiva, he proceeds towards the cremation ground. He believes that the ash of pyre will increase the power of his meditations. At the cremation ground, the Dom is considered unclean. “It was the Dom who tended the funeral pyres, forced to live at the cremation ground because he was considered uncleam.”121 But Naga Baba smeared the ash on Dom’s forehead. The shadow of Dom is supposed evil omen but Naga Baba had a kind spirit. After having bath in the river, he smeared ash to his hair and body and sat down to meditate. The Dom is considered unclean because he burns the dead body. The family in which death occurs also becomes unclean. In ‘Inside the Haveli’, we are introduced with the notion that the unclean effect of death on relatives depends on how closely related they are to the deceased.”122 Our mythology formulated that after delivery a woman becomes unclean for twenty days. Although Hindu society was divided in four fold Varna scheme, the effective unit of the caste system is not Varna but Jati. The Dom described in the novel belongs to a certain Jati which is untouchable like other untouchables. “Jatis are small endogamous groups practicing a traditional occupation and enjoying a certain amount of cultural, ritual and judicial autonomy.”123

There are different methods of ritual after death. Some communities bury their dead bodies while some cremate them. Pt. Nehru wished his body to be cremated. If he dies in foreign countries, he wished his body to be cremated there and ashes sent to Allahabad. The encyclopedia mentions the burial practices of the Hittite. Royal burial entailed cremation of the body on a pyre on the day or night of the death. It should be noted that Royal families cremated because they were Vedic Aryans. On the night of Shiva, Shiva’s acolytes broke their fast and begged at the houses of those people who were considered unclean, untouchable or profane. Every year Naga
smeared ash onto his body from the pyre and went to the house of the Dom at the night of Shiva: “He heard the litany of cruelties endured by those society counted untouchable… it did not prevent the ascetics from drinking two pitcherful of water to quench his thirst.”

When Naga Baba reached a woman’s house, she wanted to offer something to him in order to get blessing. Naga Baba neglected the sweetmeats and demanded the child as alms. The woman could not deny because she considered his blessing necessary. She commented “you must accept something. You cannot leave my house without blessing me.”

When the woman showed some hesitation, Naga Baba said that if she denied the alms to the beloved of the Destroyer, something unexpected would happen. Actually begging the child from the woman was like adoption. He wants to relieve the child from prostitution. Jasmine reacts for the adopted child: “I could not imaging a non-genetic child… Adoption was as foreign to me as the idea of widow remarriage.”

People were much terrorized by Naga Baba because being an ascetic of Shiva, he had power to curse. When Naga Baba roared reciting Shiva, men and women were terrified they might be cursed by the naked man. Actually Prof. Shankar, a great archaeologist, renounces the world to became a Naga. Overcoming human limitations, he comes to possess “superhuman powers and the ability to levitate and to place irrevocable curses on any who displease him.”

At the question of renouncing the world, the monk’s father presents accusations. He says, “I should never have allowed you to live abroad. The west has destroyed your peace of mind.”

But this accusation can not be justified. Farrukh Dhondy in ‘Bombay Duck’ realized: “If there is something good in the West why shouldn’t we accept it, adopt it and at the same time remain cautious against being dictated.” But we are advised to know the significance of our culture. “You, you brainwashed man, know your culture.”

The monks father deployed an old monk to teach him the routine of a monk in order to be convinced that he might be capable to perform acts of an
ascetic. The senior bureaucrat detaches himself from a life that was bound by ridiculous codes of conduct. In the six stories, the narrator meets the characters who are making adjustments with their passions and environment. Asit Chandmal points out that these are stories of unsettle nature of man, swinging between happiness and despair: “These are stories of obsession and renunciation, desperation and destruction, desire and death.”

Poets and singers have been enjoying the songs of prayer of great Sufi mystics for seven hundred years. Master Mohan knew that Nizamuddin had been the fountain from which the poems and songs of the great Sufi mystics had flowed throughout India. Most of the religious groups are so deeply rooted in their faith that they never agree to convert it at any rate. When Master Mohan agreed to accept Imrat as his pupil, his sister showed gratitude and requested Master Mohan to see her brother follow the practices of Islam. Anyone who wants to learn an art, needs a teacher or Guru. This is the tradition of our country since the olden days. Importance of Guru is considered greater than God. When a young man came to music teacher and begged him to accept him as his Guru, the music teacher commented: “Everyone Knows I have never taken a pupil, except for my daughter.”

In Chhandogya Upanishada’, we are introduced with Kartikeya, the son of Shiva, who is equated with the Vedic sage Sanat Kumara who taught Narada how to overcome ignorance. “In the kathasaritasagara, an 11th century work of fiction, there are stories where Kartikeya grants vidya, knowledge.”

Legends: In the Bhagavadgita, Lord Krishna gives message to Arjun to perform duties relinquishing attachment and being indifferent to success and failure. Nitin Bose was lost in the melody of the tribal song. When he asked Mr. Sen to translate the song, he interpreted, “Which god is notorious/In the neighbourhood?/Look! It is the goal of fucking/Who is notorious in the neighborhood.” When the narrator learnt about Prof. Shankar’s true identity, he
was shocked and asked him the reason of his becoming an ascetic. Professor gave the ironic answer, “Don’t you know the soul must travel through eighty four thousand births in order to become a man?”

In the novel, Gita Mehta penetrates Maya as a woman who is capable to arouse the lust of the Destroyer of Worlds. “Enraged at the destruction of his meditation, the Ascetic had opened his third eye…and reduced kama to ashes,” She narrates the existence of a goddess who had incinerated even the Great Ascetic in the fire of longing. The ancient sages had acknowledged her by fearful names as the Terrible one, the Implacable Mother, the Dark Lady, the Destroyer of Time, the Everlasting Dream. The tribal inhabitants had been worshipping the goddess for thousands of years. Nitin Bose, being a voracious reader, had a sound knowledge of legends, myths and anthropology of tribals. At the time of his transfer, his grandfather had sent him his cabin truck filled with books. Human beings are distinguished from others on account of their capacity to love. The epigraph of the novel says, “Listen, O brother./Man is the greatest truth./Nothing beyond.” All the saint-poets of India emphasized the significance of love. The wandering poets and mystics like Kabir, Mirabai, Khusrau, Tulsidas, Chisti and Chandidas made India’s soul visible to herself. Geeta Doctor comments: “In varying degree, the different tales are about love, the love of money, the love of beauty, the love of music, the love of flesh, the love of truth.” The story of the music teacher, Master Mohan, has been called a parable on love. Love has been regarded as the spring of all human actions without which human activities would become inactive. Nitin Bose’s grandmother hopes that every one of his generation should have at least “the faintest interest in all those Puranas and Vedas and Upanishads.” Our ancient scriptures formulate mythological beliefs. Sanatana literature abounds the scientific background. The modern scientific discoveries are the fruit of our ancient scripture. Santana literature has treasure of Ayurveda which is separate Veda. We are introduced that “Pipal is
the only three which exhales oxygen continually…the air of the Pipal tree destroys countless bacteria…leaves of Tulsi keep the human beings free from disease. The sound of sankh kills the bacteria. Sun bath is extremely beneficial for human health.”

139 Mahatma Gandhi has admired Sanatan literature in his Autobiography and by it he was greatly influenced. The impression of Bhagwad Gita was clearly visible in his life. He appreciated the book for its excellence to have the knowledge of truth. Sanatan literature says:

(a) *Bahujan hitaya, Bahujan Sukhaye”*

(b) “Serve Vantu Sukhinah serve santu Niramaya serve Bhadrani Pashuantu Maa kashchit Dukh Bhag Bhavet.”

140 Astrology represents the bad and good effects of different stars. The death of Sunder Pahalwan was the consequence of horoscope. “A weak moon, mars in the tenth … Saturn by ketu aspected by mars—that clearly indicates death by weapon.”

141 Nitin Bose was deeply interested in the Puranic legends. He used to enjoy the tales of demons, sages, gods, lovers and cosmologies. He was stimulated by different legends. The treatment of the Ramayana affirms its fundamental message—“love for each other and fear and respect and care that the other shouldn’t fall.”

142 The Upanishads say that one thing is better and the other things is pleasant but the wise man chooses the better over the pleasant. In the novel, the Narmada is represented as a feminine powers. All who come to its banks feel emotional security. The narrator entertained the river like a woman who was indolently stretching her limbs. He imagined the river “as a woman painting her palms and the soles of her feet with vermilion as she prepared to meet her lover.”

143 The grey green stones, found in the river bed, have been represented as the symbol of Shiva. In some mysterious way, the rocks in the Narmada have the marks denoting the third eye of Shiva and the three lines of his ascetic’s ashes. It is believed that in the living stones of the Narmada, God is to be found and they are put in the mighty temple to worship. It is
supposed that at midnight the river changes into a girl. Minstrel Uma sings, “It is foretold by the wise who know the truth/At midnight when the dark flood comes/you will turn into a girl/As radiant as a column of luster.” Mythological records says that the Narmada has come into the existence as the penance of Shiva and was named by laughter. Minstrel Uma signs, “O river, born of penance/Named by laughter/Forests heavy with wild jasmine.” The narrator explains that he was staying at the banks of Narmada because she is an unbroken record of human race. Every year at the night of Shiva, the musician’s house was filled with other musicians. All night they played one after another or sometimes together, waiting for the moment when the music teacher himself lifted his veena to praise his gods with his genius. Once Minstrel Uma sang the song which Rima used to sing to awaken Nitin bose. Mr Sen translated the song and he noted it as. “Bring me my oil and my collyrium./Sister, bring my mirror and the vermillion./Make haste with my flower garland./ My lover waits impatient in the bed.” The prayer, ‘Save us from the serpent’s venom’ is interpreted: The serpent is the desire. Its venom is the harm a man does when he is ignoring the power of desire. The novel represents the great love of Goddess Parvati until Shiva returned her love. The woman, on banks of the Narmada, showed the bureaucrat the vulgar painting of Parvati designed to woo Shiva because music was born by their great love. In Hindu mythology the wife of Shiva has several names. She is both benevolent and fierce. “As a loyal wife she is known as ‘Parvati’ the ‘daughter of Himalaya mountain,’ as ‘Uma’, ‘Mother’ Gauri’, ‘White’ and ‘Sati’, ‘Virtuous’.” Hindu mythology says that God Shiva created the veena to immortalize his wife’s immortal beauty. One morning after Shiva had made love to the Goddess all night, Shiva rose from his bed and saw the goddess asleep. He was so moved by sight of the goddess that he created the veena. The woman narrates the routine and daily prayer of his father. He recites daily:
“Om is the three worlds./Om is the three fires./ Om is the three gods/Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva.”

She herself recited to make the narrator understand three and a holy sound of Om.

“The first sound of Om is the manifest world
x x x x x
The sound of gross experience.
 x x x x x
The sound of subtle experience.
 x x x x x
The sound of potential experience
 x x x x
The incomparable target.”

In our scripture, we find different goddesses for different ragas. The music teacher used to recite a sacred saying for the particular raga. If you truly meditate on a raga’s sacred teaching, its goddess will give you mastery over its melody. The music teacher represents the musical instrument Veena as a woman. He explains the curve of the Veena as the neck. The other parts as breasts and slender arm. It is considered as the expression of Shiva’s love. The girl, whom Naga saved, followed him while he chanted, “The name of God is Shiva. Shiva is God’s name, Om Namo Shivaya.”

The novel reveals the history of Aryans and pre-Aryans. Aryans were supposed to have superior civilization and attacked pre-Aryan who were tribals. According to Nitin Bose’s diary, “pre-Aryans had a civilization long before the Aryans arrived with great cities and so forth, called themselves Nagas and worshipped the Naga, the snake.” Socio-cultural and religious characteristics of American Indians would establish: “There were Vedic Aryans in Asia Minor and in its vicinity before 1500BC when most historians allegedly claim that Aryans had
invaded India.” Burrow suggests that horses and chariots were introduced in the region by Indo-Aryans: “The introduction of horse to the countries near the East which took place during the early part of the second millennium B.C., seems to have been due to mainly these Aryans.” Dr. Peter B Clarke, in ‘The worlds Religion’, has said that “the Iran is derived from Aryan.” Dr. Mitra informed the bureaucrat that an Aryan named Avatihuma is still alive and sleeping on the north bank of the Narmada. He was further informed that pre-Aryans slaughtered a number of Aryans. But the Aryan warriors had been granted immortality by their gods. The Aryan reason as presented by the novelist is contrary to the emotional by wholeness of the pre-Aryan way of life. The war between the pre-Aryans and the Aryans was a classic struggle between instinct and reason. The polarization of reason and instinct seems to the novelist as a basic cause of tension and dejection of the modern man.

**Tribals’ Faith and Beliefs:** In the novel, we are also acquainted with the tribals and their hypocritical beliefs. In the ‘Executive story’, we are introduced with Nitin Bose who becomes obsessed with the spirit of a woman. The tribals recognized the nature of his problem and suggested him to worship one particular tribal goddess at any shrine that overlooked the Narmada. The tribal would pray the goddess to forgive Bose for denying the power of desire. Mr Chagla ironically declares, “It is not a woman who has taken possession of Nitin Bose’s soul.” Instead he is obsessed by the goddess who had to be propitiated and who is the principle of life. At the shrine of the goddess, no outsider was allowed to go except the tribals. But Nitin Bose went there because he had been touched by the power of the goddess so he was not an outsider any more. The narrator was informed, “The tribals will beg the goddess to forgive Mr. Bose for denying the power of desire.” In ‘Gods, Graves and Grandmother’, the superstitious grandmother “made Gudiya a solemn oath never to yawn under the peepal tree, or open her mouth in any way, without first snapping her fingers to scare away those phantoms.” The bureaucrat is confronted
with tribals who belong to a village named Vano, and who are well known for their fierceness. The Vano village deity is a stone image of a half-woman with the full breasts of a fertility symbol but the torso of a coiled snake. The tribals believe that they once ruled a great snake-kingdom until they were defeated by the gods of the Aryans. Nitin Bose is the nephew of narrator’s old colleague and by him the novelist provides us insight into the tribal beliefs and customs in the land of lust–kamarupa. Bose has a wide knowledge of legends, myths and anthropology of tribals. Prof. Shankar, Chairman of the Indian Preservation Trust, had renounced the world to have thorough knowledge of tribal culture and to understand the spirit of the river. Arun Joshi, in ‘The Foreigner’, gives the description which tells about the situation of tribals, “Full breasted woman, their thighs naked under wet saris, scurried back and forth like animals quarrelling over small bits of tin.”

In the novel, the feminism is expressed in two forms, i.e. tribal women and the Narmada. “The novelist could not provide a detailed treatment of tribals, yet they are not mentioned only as a decorative element.”

‘The Executive Story’ The Executive ends after Nitin Bose performed rites to the tribal goddess on the banks of the Narmada. In ‘The Journey’, we find people deciding “to erect a temple for him (dead monkey), for the god must be appeased and honoured. While in America, she “could not free herself to the idea that the gods were still hunting her, that they were waiting to seek retribution.”

In the novel, we are introduced with an old woman who is capable to create supernatural activities. Nitin Bose says, “He had seen an old woman raise flames from the palms of her hands.” In ‘Thousand Faces of Night’, Devi imagines “herself a Durga or a Kali, ready to avenge the assault on her inner core.”

(3) Common Thread of Life:-

In the novel, the river is presented as the common thread, sutra, that provides the novel with its continuity and it brings together a variety of experiences. Prof. Shankar comments: “If anything is sacred about this river, it is the individual
experiences of the human beings who have lived here.”

We appreciate the patriotism of Rahul Singh in Pakistani wars but on coming home, he finds his family dead and lands grabbed by a man prospering under the protection of local politicians. The great musician tells his daughter. “You must think yourself as water washing over stone, shaping it with the relentless touch of love.”

In the Monk Story, Jain Muni relinquished his multimillion dollar international empire to seek ultimate truth. “At the age of twenty six, I had already become fatigued by the world.”

In Jain religion, non-violence is essential principle and a human heart must conquer many obstacles so that a monk may adopt ahimsa as a basic formula of his life. Vikram Seth states, “Family life with children is a comedy both today, yesterday and tomorrow.”

A monk has to overcome his disgust at all the things. He has to beg in the filth of the bazaars. He has to eat discarded things. Without these thing, one can neither understand nonviolence not gain freedom from the world. At the time of ritual of renunciation, the monk’s father could not help weeping but the monk could do nothing to console him. Tariq Mia narrates Kabiravad saying that he threw the twig onto a mud flat in the river. The twig put down roots and grew up into a huge tree that is Kabirvad. Traiq Mia explains that the human heart has only one secret that is capacity to love. In all the six stories, we notice the relation of love, physical or spiritual. Although Master Mohan showed extreme love for Imart but at home, he is neglected by his wife. She always scolds him for her misery. He cooks his food himself away from other members of the family. The grandfather of Mahesh represents different picture of a wife. “The path a woman must walk to reach heaven is a clear, well lit one. The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform… serving her husband, she is honored in heaven.”

Like Master Mohan’s wife, karuna repents that she had “married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time.” Her husband was just the overage Indian husband, “unexciting, uninspiring, untutored.” In “Starry Nights’ Asha often tells Kishanbhai, “All of you are just
the same, but wait I will show you. I will do to men what they try to do to me.”

Master Mohan used to be busy singing throughout night. He saw that a few beggar children remained in the tent who were asleep on the cotton carpets at three O’clock. While singing, his emotion was encouraged very often but he was unable to express gratitude due to his shame of being very poor. Due to her fear of losing the job, Imrat’s mother left him with Master Mohan who was very kind-hearted. She requested Master Mohan to feed him and give him a place to sleep until she could send for him. Imrat earned a lot of money by the art of singing. This story reveals Master Mohan’s extreme love for Imrat. He committed suicide because “he could not exist without loving someone as he had loved the blind child.”

The novel portrays thatched cottages in the village which looked more Shakespearean than Indian. To console his dejected mood, Nitin Bose studied the Rig Veda which represented his state accurately, “At first was Death/That which did mean an utter emptiness/And emptiness, mark, thou, is hunger’s Self.”

‘The Courtesan’s Story’ portrays the courtesans of the haveli rumored as much wealthier than the wives of the Nawab because other rulers showered presents on them. The novel reveals the courtesans being very famous not only as beautiful personalities but also learned ones who were in great demand to educate the heirs of India’s mightiest kingdoms.

Naga Baba saved the girl from prostitution and trained her according to the ideals of a monk. Consequently a minstrel Uma is borned. Uma was the fruit of Baba’s austerity, so, according to Tariq Mia, he cannot leave her because “She was more than a child to him.”

The Novel penetrates Prof. Shankar as a research scholar who discovered some cave drawings in the area on the banks of the Narmada which belonged to the stone Age. Lower down the same cliff, there were implements from successive ages-Neo-lithic, Iron, Bronze. The bureaucrat was deeply shocked when he found Prof. Shankar disguised as Naga Baba. He asked, “why you became
an ascetic, why you stopped, what all this means?... Is this your enlightenment? Is this why you endured all those penances?”

Pfor. Shankar gave an ironic answer, “Don’t you know the soul must travel through eighty four thousand births in order to become a man” In our Sanatan literature, it is propagated that the whole human race, birds, beasts and plants, have been made by one potter, who is almighty. “There are, on the whole, 84 lakhs of creatures as germs, insects, reptiles, birds, quadrupeds, bipeds and human beings.”

In ‘The Thousand Faces of Night’ the village doctor says, “what can I do about the sins of your previous birth.” John Keats was troubled by the burden of morality, and was sick of the world where youth grows pale, and spectre thin and dies and where beauty can not keep her lustrous eyes.

In the musician’s story, master Mohan played the morning raga and explained the significance of it, initiating Imrat into the mystery of the world’s rebirth when light disperses darkness and Vishnu rises from his slumber to redream the universe. In the ‘Courtesan’s Story’, we find Rahul Singh, the bandit, shouting angrily, “Don’t you know? You, who have been my wife in so many lives before this one? Do you know?” He further says, “you have been mine in many lifetime but each time I lost you.”

In ‘Jasmine’ the protagonist conveys, “My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for.”

(4) Modernity:-

In the novel, Gita Mehta not only throws light on the traditional elements but also portrays modern events occurred at different places. Nitin Bose is convinced that it is Rima-who had bewitched him. His diary recounts his experiences in a remote tea estate. At the possession of Nitin Bose, Dr. Mitra offers explanation. “Not possessed exactly but pulled in two directions… putting Aryan reason against the primal beliefs of the tribals.” Dr Shankar led an archaeological team to narrator’s bungalow and we are introduced that Dr. Shankar is the Naga Baba. He accepted the secular world to seek a higher enlightenment. By his wide experience, he is
convinced that the river is not sacred. He comments: “Mere mythology. A waste of time. If anything is sacred about the river, it is individual experience of the human beings who have lived here.”

Mr. XX in ‘Bombay Duck’ finds that “cows are only animals, ceremonies, only a waste of time, astrology, a wistful thinking.” In the novel, the Narmada is represented as a spiritual power which saves from a snake’s poison but the narrator comments: “I never enter the caves, for fear of snakes, unable to believe that even the Narmada will protect me from a serpent’s fangs.”

The different tales of the novel clarify that renunciation of life is not the key to enlightenment. Reason and passion, intellect and emotion, logic and intuition are the two integral components of life itself without which life would become meaningless. Life comprises acceptance of suffering. The redemptive vision of life leads to a tragic contradiction of life through which one can arrive at a higher level of perception and awareness. Myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual of self discovery. We find, at the end of the novel, the protagonist not detached and complacent about his choice of Vanaprasthi. According to Tariq Mia, after finishing self realization, one must experience life oneself and must not escape from life by renouncing the world. Master Mohan’s love for blind Imrat makes us understand the ways of the human heart. The narrator chose a hard way of knowledge led by hearsay not by experience but he reminds the mullah that he knows the world enough. Prof. Shankar tells the narrator that he has no great truth to share because he is only man. He suggests that there can be no greater enlightenment that can be attained after enduring severe penances. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator realizes his mistake of renouncing the world and comments: “Perhaps destiny had brought me to the banks of the Narmada to understand the world.”

He envies Prof. Shankar for still belonging to a world that he has given up. He does not want to sit with the Mullah who seemed frozen in time-untouched by the realities of the world. Prof. Shankar’s reincarnation as the Naga
Baba and then reverting to his earlier life represent the pertinent example of a truly enlightened person. Finally, he gives importance “only [to] understand songs about other men and not about gods and goddesses.”\textsuperscript{182} The idealistic songs that appealed to youthful Raja extols human creativity in comparison to Gods. Thou didst created night but I made the lamp./Thou didst create clay but I made the cup.”\textsuperscript{183} Dhondy is a non-traditional writer and does not like to be emotional. “India is fantastic but sad and [she] wished people did not have emotions and she’s come to look for traditions but she wishes people didn’t have traditions but then they wouldn’t be people.”\textsuperscript{184}

Prof. Shankar, through wide experience of his life, argues that the Narmada is only immortal not holy. He comments: “I only care for the river’s immortality, not its holiness.”\textsuperscript{185} Although the bureaucrat passed his early life in cities working as a civil servant, “he was forced to modify tradition”\textsuperscript{186} after the death of his wife. Through different modern attitude of various characters in novel, the novelist wants to modify the traditions which have no reason and scientific significance. Dhondy comments: “Our culture itself has become so uncultured, artificial, redundant and stuffed with stagnation and distortion that it is now eating away the vitals of growth and substance.”\textsuperscript{187} Jasmine finds that synthesis is needed between the traditional India and contemporary American way of life. Bharati Mukherjee wants to hint that “social order needs change.”\textsuperscript{188} Geeta in ‘Inside the Haveli’ accepts, “What is called for is a suitable modification of traditions, a total break from tradition is not necessary.”\textsuperscript{189} The substance of the novel ‘Inside the Haveli’ lies in analyzing and assessing the limit to which modernity can be acceptable in life if traditions weigh on the other side of the scale.

When the monk was preparing for the renunciation, he was mocked by his friends saying that he had to be separated from luxurious way of life. “No more whisky, no more cards. Remember, You will never be able to lie between the thighs of a woman again.”\textsuperscript{190} Imrat’s songs were so impressive that his audience had
increased greatly. He sings, “Some worship Him in Mecca./Some in Benares./But I centre my worship on the eyebrow of my Beloved.” In the ‘Executive Story’, Nitin Bose is shown drinking at the club and eating Chinese meals at the Calcutta club which shows his modern attitude. When Nitin Bose reached his office, he could not stop laughing at the thought that he had entered a British fantasy of India untouched by the chaos of the last forty years. In his bedroom, he saw massive ebony bed with serpents carved on the head board enclosed in the billowing mosquito net. He does not have faith in magic and any spirit. He comments: “What nonsense! I don’t believe in magic, some one must be trying to poison me.”

The novelist tries to say that we should use our reason before believing in a traditional fact. Dhondy believes that “only such strides at thought can stimulate a cultural rethinking and perhaps a positive change or regeneration.”

We are informed about a most wanted bandit in the Vindhyas whose name is used to frighten children into disobedience. The bandit abducted the daughter of a woman and Nitin Bose becomes shocked hearing it. He wants to inform the police but the woman prohibited him to do so. The daughter wanted to give the kidnapper bribe. “My mother is not a wealthy woman. But she will beg or steal to pay a reasonable ransom for me.”

In ‘The Promise of Spring’, Sarala Barnabas, portrays know Ruksana’s children were attempted to kidnap. “The climax came when they attempted to kidnap the children.” The novel penetrates the prosperous condition of courtesans who enjoy every kind of luxury available in our country and abroad. It represents the great Shahbag families in which they enjoy the river air and their horse drawn carriages lit in the light of lamps imported from Paris. With changing circumstances, Shahbag gardens changed into factories. The wood had been cut down to make labour colonies. They had to keep the windows to the west closed because of the smell of the open gutter. We find Nitin Bose very cautious when he discovered guns in the jungle because he was responsible for the safety of his staff. At the night of Shiva, Naga Baba used to beg
something from the poor and untouchable people in order to remove the hypocrisy from the society. “They knew how much the ascetic honoured them by eating from their hands. When he marked their foreheads with ash, they touched his feet in gratitude, denied such blessing from the temples that they were forbidden to enter.” In ‘The Thousand Faces of Night’, Devi listens to the remarks of Baba, “Non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, purity, control of senses—this, in brief, is the dharma of all the four castes.” Bapsi Sidhwa in ‘I am Pakistani’ portrays Hari and Moti and their untouchable daughter Papoo, become more untouchable as they are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu caste. While the Sharmas and the Daulatrams represented Brahmins like Nehru who are dehumanized by their lofty caste and caste-marks. This Caste discrimination is not found in our scriptures. The massage of our Veda is, “My dear fellow, none is higher and none is lower among you. All the people of the world are brothers. Try all together to get the name and fame.”

When Naga Baba goes to the woman’s house to beg at the night of Shiva, he was refused to offer the alms at first. Actually it is also a bad tradition in our country. People who are capable to earn their living, are found begging at different places. But when Naga Baba declares that he is an ascetic of Shiva, the man is shocked and the woman of the house has to give him the girl as the alms whom he demands to save from prostitution. Prof. Shankar as a Naga Baba is teaching the poems of Shankaracharya to the child he rescued. While explaining the poem, he represents scientific view about the plants mentioned in the ancient poem. “Indian mysticism has evolved as much in the past hundred years as the science of physics itself.”

**Romantic View:** In the novel, Gita Mehta reveals the theme of romance also. She represents the ‘Executive story’ in which Nitin Bose falls in love with the tribal girl during his stay in a tea estate. She offers herself to Bose and he enters the fascinating phenomenon of sensual pleasures. “As that musky fragrance enveloped me, claiming me and exciting me at the same time... Stretching out my hands, I
grasped the swelling firmness of a woman’s breast... Maddened by the fragile barrier of her ornaments, I crushed her in my embrace.”

For the first time, he knew the contours of a woman’s body. In ‘Snapshots’, we find Reema, amidst her friends in her house, commenting: “Come on gals, drink up. This an occasion. The best. I have not felt this exhilarated since I lost my virginity and all of you know how, when, where and with whom that happened.”

In ‘Starry Night’, we find Asha Rani in the hands of Kishanbhai who first exploits her physically, but later on finds himself in love with her.” She further declares for the men, “They only want to control their lives all right. They want to tell them who to marry. Who to sleep with, who to act with, who to be nice to, who to ignore, who to snub,”

With the tribal woman, Nitin Bose enjoyed the bliss and Mehta explains through the mouth of Bose, “Her small teeth pierced my skin again and again and I heard the hissing of her pleasure against my throat.”

In ‘Cry, the peacock’, Anita Desai presents romantic scene. Their provocative display and movement as though say, “See, what I have? Like it? Take it, gentleman, take it, it’s yours!” And the response is what it should be, “Beautiful B-beautiful b-bitch!”

In ‘Come Rain’ by Jai Nimbkar, we find a discord between Ann and Ravi because Ravi seeks pleasure in the company of his old friend Usha and indulges in sexual relationship with her while he is away from home under the pretext of duty.

In the ‘Courtesan’s Story’, we are introduced with courtesan’s daughter who is represented as an angel, giving “love to all who met her as a child gives love to those who have cosseted and spoiled it because it does not know there is harshness in the world or ugliness.”

The effect of love is so effective in the play that even Rahul Singh, the most wanted bandit in the Vindhyas, is fascinated by it. Rahul Singh watches the beauty of abducted daughter when she practices dancing in the cave. He was watching “as if trying to prove there was a greater art than all my arts, the ability to love someone as he loved me.” He is shown putting is life on stake
for the sake of her love. In the novel, the tribal women’s physical appearance is described as “sturdy tribal women, their sturdy bodies and catlike faces with the triangular tattoo marks high on each cheekbone.” They are portrayed more dangerous than Tariq Mis’s tales of murder and suicide. Tribal men are shown fierce but their women are described having slender brown arms and full breasts. They are represented voluptuous by the novelist. The description of Rima is found in sensuous details: “The slender shoulders pulled forward by the weight of her breasts? The perspiration shining on her narrow waist above the mango curve of her hip.”

Nitin Bose comes to know that Rima is a coolie’s wife whose limbs are squat and ugly and she is only one of the bovine tea pickers. She always suprised Bose’s senses with tribal songs. “Her role, however brief it may appear to be, is functional in the novel, and like bilasia of the strange case of Billy Biswas, she represents the elemental passions before which our rational self seems to be utterly weak.”

In the novel, the tribal women are represented singing, “On the hill/See the peacock’s feathers sway/As I am swaying on your lap; Sighing on your lap./Smiling on your lap/O, my handsome friend.” Although Rima was married but Nitin Bose did not find it odd that he was enchanted by her. When Rima heard about his departure from her, she wept bitterly and asked, “Should I return to my husband? He works as a coolie at the railway depot in Agartala. Should I join him while you are gone.”

In ‘Shreya of Sonagarh’, we are introduced with Shreya lying down “with open legs, willing to let him have the only thing he claims, as his right, even if it was with a frigidity.” In ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ we are introduced with Nathan and his wife who were enveloped in the romantic mood in the wake of Deepawali. Nathan’s Wife comments: “In the staring darkness I felt his body moving with desire, his hands on me were trembling and I felt my senses opening like a flower to his urgency, I closed my eyes and waited.” When Nitin Bose came out of fascination, he is filled with shame knowing Rima as a coolie’s wife. For the last
time, he remained awake when Rima climbed out of the bed to warp herself in her sarong. He hated her ugly limbs in the light of dawn. Nitin Bose is represented flirting other woman whose boredom was diverted by the novelty of his presence. He declares, “When they took me to their bedrooms, I kept the lights on as I kissed their large eyes ... until I buried the memory of Rima’s body in their warm brown flesh.”

In ‘Snapshots’ by Shobha De, we find Rohit who is involved in affairs with other women by which his wife Aparna is hurt deeply. She was hurt by Swati’s coupling with him right in her house and her leaving the Dupatta. In ‘The God of Small Things’, Arundhati Roy represents Navomi Ipe who was the daughter of Rev. E. John Ipe. She fell in love with the Irish monk Father Mulligan. She almost subdued him “With a trembling, kissable mouth and blazing, cool black eyes.”

In ‘Roots and Shadows’, Indu offers herself twice to Naren. Then she is haunted by the question how she will view the act of adultery. Immediately after the act, she goes to her own bed but avoids sleeping deliberately because it would erase “the intervening period and what happened between Naren and her.” Nitin Bose is represented so much obsessed with Rima that he only talked nonsense when asked by the guard about his well being. He was only calling the name of Rima again and again and was singing the song the tribal women sing at the time of marriage.

The novelist portrays the Narmada as “a beautiful woman dancing [and] ... arousing the lust of ascetics... [stricken with] the madness of their infatuation... a woman adorning herself with jewels... a woman painting her palms and the soles of her feet with vermillion as she prepared to meet her lover.” In the novel, the Narmada is represented as whore and the novelist cites the verses composed by Shankaracharya to approve it, “O river born of love,/Named by laughter,/ Your purple waters slip like a garment/From your sloping banks.” The Novelists quotes, “Then he changed you into a river/To cool the lusts of holy men/And called you Narmada,/Soother of Desires.”

The novelist describes the season when the village
woman commented on the narrator that he is fascinated by them because spring rouses even old tiger from their rest. They were talking to be careful not to walk alone because mango trees were in bloom. They commented: “Kama must be sharpening his arrows of blossoms and stringing his bow with bees, sister. Take care the shahib does not lure us to a seduction. He could not help smiling at the women’s references to Kama, God of Love with his sugarcane bow strung with honeybees and his five flowered arrows of desire. The narrator felt that mythology might at any moment become reality and “Kama might suddenly draw his sugarcane bow, known as the Exciter of Madness, and unleash one of his five arrows on helpless wanderer who would then crave some unsuspecting woman as an incarnation of Delight, the Goddess of Involuntary Allure.” In the ‘Executive story’ love plays very crucial role. Nitin Bose confesses to have been sick with love as if he had been pierced by all five arrows of the god of love. He feels as if he had been “wounded with the fifth and fatal arrow, the Carrier of Death.”

Now he understood why his “grandfather’s books called there hills Kamrupa, the kingdom of the God of Love.” Hindu mythology says that Ascetic was also warned by the gods that he must feel desire for without Desire the play of the world would cease. “But still the Ascetic had sneered as he was pierced by the five flower-tipped arrows unleashed by Kama from his sugarcane bow—the Enchanter, the Inflamer, the Parcher, the Paroxysm of Desire, the carrier of Death.” In this way, according to the novel, desire is the source of everything that is worthwhile in the world. But it should be managed wisely otherwise it will lead one astray. In ‘Snapshots’ Reema comments: “Sex is not filthy”, She further says, “Our minds make it so. Look at Khajuraho, Konark... have any of you studied the ‘Kama Sutra’? Fascinating. It’s pity we got brainwashed by some frustrated, repressed idiots. I think sex is celebration—the highest form of religion.” Among Hindus, the worship of
Shivlinga stubbed into a vagina—like shape reminds them that “sex is the most pious act of nature and which gives a taste of bliss of life.”

According to mythology, Kama might call on his friends—spring with his ruthless hands and his beautiful body clothed only in lotus buds or he might call on the Malayan Wind carrying the aromatic perfumes of the South, or most dangerous of all, Amorous Mood,” The Executive narrates his romantic mood when he along with others returned from driving his women to their won homes. He found the sheets crumpled with humidity and sweat, saw the long black hairs lying like accusations on the pillow, and knew their lives were leaking away. Bose’s colleagues of the tea garden were young and they boasted of rogue elephants tracked, man eating tigers shot, hot blooded women tamed. In ‘Shreya of Sonagarh’ we find analysis of Shreya’s sexual relationship with her husband, Brijesh, and her paramour, Anand. “At the beginning of the last century, Indian men had taken Malagasy wives whom they abandoned when their Indian spouses came.” When the young man becomes abnormal, he is suspected of undergoing some severe emotional strain—overwork, an unhappy love affair, that sort of things. Nitin Bose realizes the presence of tea estate boys in the office as if they had come there after a night of suicidal drinking followed by love making in air-conditioned bedrooms scented with tuber roses bought fresh every morning from the New Market. Farrukh Dhondy in ‘Bombay Duck’ comments: there is a discreet attempt “to show how the people strive to realize the natural principle of union between the sexes without being bothered by social code, as if each were in search of his/her other half.” In ‘Cry, the Peacock’, Maya tries to shatter the very identity of women in our contemporary society dominated by men in which woman, longing for love, is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide.

Nitin Bose is represented so much involved in the romanticism that at night, he dreamed of legendary Kingdoms guarded by hooded cobras. In ‘The Journey’ by
Indira Ganesan’, Renu is portrayed as seeing her cousin after his death even talking to him. She considers herself as his bride. It is suggested that she nearly immolates herself like an ancient Sati for his sake. When Nitin Bose did not want to return back from the tea estate, Ashok said that he should not pass his time being separated from a woman in that age. He commented: “It is down right sinister for a man of your age not to have had a woman for two solid years.” Although women has equal significance in the society, they have always been assigned a subordinate and relative position. “Man can think of himself without woman. She can not think of herself without man... she essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him, she is sex... absolute sex, no less.” Nitin Bose was deeply enveloped in the romantic feeling and the darkness of the night mirrored his restless mind. He commented: “For the firs time I was lonely, and when I entered my bedroom I felt the massive bed sneering at my unused mahnood.” In ‘The Guide’, Raju tells Rosie, “All night I didn’t sleep... The way you danced your form and figure haunted me whole night.” He further says, “life is so blank without your presence.” In ‘The Thousand Faces of Night’ Sita condemns Mahesh for having a lonely life without wife or child. She goes away with Gopal in order to get emotional voice through music. With the physical growth of Music Teacher’s daughter, her attitude towards life also changed. She comments: “By now my body was beginning to show its maturity, changes that I could not overlook if only because the weight of the Veena was too much against my budding breasts, With these changes in my physique had come a change in my emotional state.” In the ‘Monk’s Story’, we find the monk who discloses his previous private life history which includes romanticism. He declares, “My wife was a gentle creature who could not discard her formality, even in our marital bed... For myself, I did not miss the sexual excesses of my earlier life... I no longer needed to play the husband.” The novel represents the secret marriage of bandit Rahul Singh
and the abducted daughter. He married her at the temple of Supaneshwara secretly and wanted to teach her the use of guns in order to escape the police.

**Women’s Condition:** In the novel, Gita Mehta portrays the women’s condition found in the contemporary society. She throws light on people’s view which describes the real condition of women. After the birth of a daughter and a son, the monk’s wife was so much pre occupied with her maternal duties that she did not need the monk as before. The description reveals that after child birth, a father finds less comfort and his responsibilities are increased according to the needs of the family members. In the eighteenth century, the English tea estate managers were often without teeth and hair and they came to Calcutta only to bid for wives when the ships from London discharges their cargoes of desperate English women trying to escape lives of penury back home. Nitin Bose is suggested to drink, shoot and fuck. He is told that “real women will do anything to please a man.”

Although women has great veneration for men, they are neglected. Anjana’s husband never accepts her in spite of all her love and devotion. “She did all she could to make it up to him, keeping him is the luxury that he loved and pampering him in all his desires and manifold tastes.” In the ‘Courtesan’s Story’, the courtesan expresses her sorrow as the era of the haveli has passed and she permitted her daughter to appear only “at wedding, or the birth of a son, or before families celebrating the head of their household.” Irawati Karve notes that “except on ceremonial occasions, the daughter-in-law must never be in the same room as her father-in-laws or her elderly afinal Kins.”

But in ‘The New Woman in Indian English Fiction’ when Astha was pregnant, her husband Hemant said to his mother who hoped the child to be a son, “But Ma, I want a daughter. In America there is no difference between boys and girls, how can this country get anywhere if we go on treating our women this way?” A little story from Graciela Hierro’s article ‘Women Alone’ portrays two
girls at being adults who questions each other and concludes that after having grown up, a girl should be more than a wife-mother image.

Rahul Singh in ‘A River Sutra’ had absolute faith in his wife whom he had kidnapped. But she did not like him and wanted to get rid of him. “Not until I conceived did my husband truly believe I love him. Then he became reckless.”

Contrary to it, in ‘The Guide’ Marco disbelieves Rosie and comments: “You are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics.”

The Music Teacher’s wife was very cautious for her daughter’s future. She had wide experience of the world outside. She considered intellect necessary for a girl. She believes, “A woman without genius can be protected only by a husband in a harsh world designed for men.”

The novel shows the superstitions that if a mother dies after giving birth to a girl, the girl is considered misfortunate. When Naga asked the rescued girl why she was called misfortunate by her father, she conveys, “Because my mother died giving birth to me.”

She condemns the courtesan saying that the woman never treated her like a daughter. She just kept her in the house for service of customers. In ‘The Thousand Faces of Night’ the daughter-in-law is accused saying that, “Do you need any more proof that this is not a woman? The barren witch has killed my grandson, and she lies there asking us why?”

The Music Teacher wanted to marry her daughter to one of his pupils. Her mother was very cautious for marriage because of the growing age of her daughter. The daughter tells, “My mother was growing impatient for our marriage to be performed. The stranger was by now twenty one years old, I was eighteen.”

In ‘A New woman’ Astha’s mother often declares, “When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the Shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth.”

In ‘Inside the Haveli’ Kanwar Sa tells Gita, “As long as your parents-in-law are alive,
you don’t have any problems... Leave it to your elders to decide what is best for Vijay Bai Sa.”

The novel describes the fashion of giving gifts at the occasion of marriage. This fashion has become a social evil which is very burning problem of the society. Music Teacher’s daughter narrates, “The priest was organized, an auspicious night was chosen for our nuptials. We sent shawls and saris for my bridegroom’s parents.” The gift is presented in order to show respect and honour. Gift includes tangible things as well as non-tangible things such as understanding, admiration, appreciation, love and sympathy. Kandhari in ‘Nation of Fools’ gives a huge basket of all sorts of fruit and other gifts including cloth for a shirt and a pair of trousers and a necktie for his son-in-law, Omi Khatri, a piece of silk cloth for his mother and hand embroidered muslim Kurta for Khatri.”

In ‘The Promise of Spring’ by Sarala Barnabas, we are introduced with Hunt who enjoyed with her wife and his Indian friends came with traditional gifts for the bride and warm invitations to their homes but his wife spurned their kindness.

The novel ‘A River Sutra’ discloses the deeper meaning which seems running simultaneously in it. Most of the tales are characterized by ambiguity and they represent the real picture of our society where we find traditional beliefs dominating. The novel also presents the modern attitude of the novelist at different places. The contents of the tales may be interpreted differently by different people according to their sensibility. “Good literature, unlike reportage, is valued for the multiplicity of meaning, and A River Sutra is no exception.” The interpretation of the tales reveals the meaning to provide a coherent vision of life and the protagonist is compelled to question those values that he had taken for granted.
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