… she has created a new language of literature and has recreated India for Indians.

Asit Chandmal
Chapter - VI

In Retrospect

Gita Mehta, an acclaimed journalist, turned Indian author is known for her fiction and non-fiction works focusing India, its culture, history, religion and Western perception. As a journalist she has covered a number of significant world events, including the Bangladesh War of 1971 and the first elections in the former Indian Princely States. With her journalist views and skill she has not only been able to capture the readers’ attention but also stir their souls. On her writings, the *Hindustan Times* quotes, “It has all the sharpness of the camera eye and an evocative crispness which only language can afford” (*KC* Cover page).

Her writings can be assessed as the prose exposing myriad social, cultural and political problems within Indian Social frame-work. A *Publisher's Weekly* contributor in “Contemporary Authors Online” says, “Mehta does not avoid the controversies of life in her homeland, including the caste system and political / religious rivalries; rather, she willingly exposes its complexities.”

Along with Indianness, another trait which can be traced in her works is Hinduism. She has focused herself on multifaceted metaphysics of diverse Hindu perspectives. Through its description she intends to
propose religious, spiritual and philosophical ways to control the desires and attain satisfaction in one’s life.

India has always been a mystical attraction to many of the writers. But to write and make others understand about India is not an easy task, as it requires more than mere love for country. Land-mark books can only be created with identification of its history, socio-political events, ethnicity and religiosity as Gita Mehta does. Lacking these pre-requisites many non-Indian historians and authors, who have attempted to write about India, became unsuccessful in establishing the desired impact. Some writers have succeeded on the basis of their relationship with India. Most of the aspiring writers have settled down in some other country and depict displaced migrancy and longings for their motherland. A close examination of their works shows that their intention has always been the glorification of complex mystic Indian culture. Apart from this, Gita Mehta’s sincere dedication to her motherland and alienation from all “isms” gracefully establishes her above the other contemporary women writers of India.

A few American and Commonwealth writers, while working on Indian theme, experimented and evolved the new technique to be known as the non-fiction novel. In this technique the narrator expresses ideas in a very remarkable and arresting manner. V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee and Gita Mehta are among those who have successfully attempted this kind of literary form. Gita Mehta’s all non-fictional works are written in
the first person and she becomes the participant observer, striving objectivity that seems to characterize her goal. Gita Mehta, in her writings, stands close to the art of a journalist and yet differs fundamentally from the function and method of a journalist. Khan, while discussing this technique states:

Though in many respects, the writer appears to function as a journalist, he is neither given the position of a journalist nor does he wish to function as a journalist; in a sense he may be called the unacknowledged journalist who expresses his ideas and thoughts on a given situation of society, country or event in his own proprietorial position. (71)

Through brilliant use of this technique Gita Mehta has emerged as an impressive writer of the world. Her mode of expression and powerful skill of exposition support her to draw subjects from Indian history, philosophy, religion, socio-political condition and East-West encounter in the modern world. All her fiction and non-fiction writings are based on different experiences gathered or experienced by the author herself. The works reflect her great concern, dedication and love for India which can be traced along with utmost devotion for Hindu religion and its philosophies. Commenting on her writing style, Pradyumna S. Chauhan writes, “She brings the reporter’s keen observation, the journalist’s scrupulous accuracy and the ad writer’s passion for colourful phrasing to her task as writer. The gift makes her work eminently readable, even memorable” (150).
In *Karma Cola*, the subject matter is very close to the American new journalism of the sixties which draws attention to the new pattern of social organization and trends of the youth, the drug culture and their quest for eternity or “*nirvana*”. The dream destination of such credulous hippies seems to be the genuine spiritual India, but the flocking of wandering youth created a scope for the fraudulent gurus to accumulate materialistic wealth. The situation creates East-West encounter and artistic stuff for a writer to present a piece of literature with greater depth. In *Karma Cola* Gita Mehta appears very competent in her reporting with a bit distortion of the fact as Michel Corrado states:

She has presented them in a full instead of a naked manner, brought out the sights, sounds and feelings. Surrounding those facts, and connected them by comparison with other facts of history, society and literature in an artistic manner that does not diminish but gives greater depth and dimension to the facts. (146-147)

*Karma Cola* does not underline the anguish or rootlessness of an expatriate writer. Her views are objective and tone is entirely compromising. All the irony and satire portrayed in her work reflects human concern from its core. She is more like a Western in portrayal of Indian vision but her treatment is quite reverent towards spiritual India and Hinduism.
East-West encounter portrayed by the author is in the form of conflict between the claim of the body and of the mind – of materialism and of spiritualism. Happenings in various ashrams during the metaphysical osmosis present cultural collisions between the two ends. The book can be sophisticatedly analyzed as a witty contrast, as the Westerners are turning Indians in search of Eastern enlightenment and Indians becoming westernized. The author not only registers the social and economical evils of a developing country but also skillfully handles the portrayal of spiritual steadfasts. Being a committed Indian writer, she has focused on the losing multi-faceted cultural and spiritual heritage of the country. She has highlighted the glories of mystic East in order to improve the vision of India and to clear the existing misconceptions which the Western people commonly use to portray.

A spiritual seeker concludes India as a paradise for cultivating the methods of transcendence and philosophy. Thousands of immigrants generated a massive Eastern market for the hucksters and their beneficiaries. Indian ashrams and their activities attracted the Occidentals to perform *karma* and attain *nirvana*. In such places the charlatans used spirituality as a pitchfork to drain wealth. Gita Mehta satirizes sudden emergence of mystic East as the best marketing entrepreneur of the world. Various courses in levitation and transcendental meditation were being offered. Satirizing mercilessly she writes, “Nirvana for $100 a Day….My
followers have no time. So I give them instant salvation. I turn them into neo-sanyasis” (KC 102).

Crooked gurus involved in minting money became the sole cause of many casualties, spoiling the image of true mystic country with supernatural sages. Occidental seekers who desired to enlighten their soul and unwind themselves from the worldly affairs struggled to find a guru but the real despair occurred when every seeker got a guru. These hucksters developed their own crooked philosophies in the name of Hindu pantheon to draw money from the foreign disciples.

Through *Karma Cola*, Gita Mehta has successfully wiped off all the misleading ideas about India and provided the readers with a clear perception on the entire philosophical path of Hinduism. She even discusses that various paths of yoga for self-transcendence are Bhakti yoga, the meditation of adoration; Hath yoga, the meditation of physical endurance; Tantra yoga, the meditation of senses; Guru yoga, enlightenment through the teacher and Reincarnation, enlightenment through rebirth. Out of these she has elevated Bhakti yoga as the best path for transcendence while performing one’s duties or *karma*.

All these ways of attaining salvation in great Hindu pantheon acquired the form of a ridiculous trick perpetuated in Indian ashrams. Many spiritual bedlams have been noticed and reported by the author. She implies that the authenticity of disciples’ spiritual quest is also a
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determining factor in selection of the guru. Therefore Gita Mehta seeks to
debunk the notion that all Indians are expert in spiritual matters. She
humorously and sarcastically exposes the emptiness behind placing one’s
hope for the future in the hands of gurus. Irony on Western materialism
can also be easily traced as wealth is being used to obtain traditional
Eastern religious beliefs.

In *Karma Cola*, the author has propounded her beliefs on performing
one’s *karma* which she seems to expound in *A River Sutra* through
Professor Shankar, Naga Baba of the past life. In *A River Sutra* she has
demonstrated her deep love for the Hindu mythology and admiration of the
genuine spiritual rural India. Although she manages to maintain a distance
from being over mystical her characters seem to indulge in the mystical
power. The titles of both the works consist of the Sanskrit words like
“*karma*” and “*sutra*”, which immediately give rise to the expectation of
entry into the world of Indian metaphysics and spiritual belief. As per the
expectation, both the works establish the importance of *karma*, the sacred
teaching of Bhagvad Gita. At the superficial level, *Karma Cola* seems to
imply the strangeness of cross-cultural encounter but with deeper insights
establishes various ways of self-transcendence as per the Hindu
metaphysics.

*A River Sutra* by Gita Mehta is full of lovely stories linked with the
unifying power of the river Narmada. The author has used the river as a
narrative device to deal with diverse themes of renunciation, desire, lust,
love, devotion and ultimate peace. A retired bureaucrat with philosophical bent of mind, who accepts the manager’s post in a government rest house, is the narrator of the story. He comes across various stories associated directly or indirectly with the river Narmada and understands it with the help of some other person. Each tale involves a discourse between the narrator and some other person like the ancient way of teachings. Pushpinder Syal also believes:

It appears that Mehta has attempted a revival of these kinds of narrative continuities as all the stories are spoken (except for one written diary account) and reveal some characteristics of the kind of spoken discourse that is found in traditional narratives. (84)

The stories are thematically linked with Narmada and told by different storytellers. Later on the narrator tries to understand their hidden philosophies either with the help of Tariq Mia or somebody else. These stories are used as a vehicle of expression to explain the fundamental theme of life viz. ‘love’. To explain this simple theme, Gita Mehta has posed various complicated problems and also provided exquisite explanations through the discourse between the narrator and the listener. It can be said that the author has imitated the ancient traditional style of Upanishadatic teachings.
Love, the guiding principle of all lives, has been focused by the author in various forms. In most of the stories it remains a dominant motive force while in others it provides an attitude to live life. Geeta Doctor appropriately comments:

In varying degrees the different tales are about love: the love of money, the love of beauty, the love of music, the love of the flesh, the love of truth and the search for it that can lead to transcendence. Or to put it in other words it is about the need for passion. (26)

The Teacher’s story exhibits love and admiration of Master Mohan towards his disciple. It can be stated as a parable of love. In the story the ill-fated Master Mohan seeks to get emotional refuge in the pure devotional voice of his blind disciple Imrat. His singing not only brings mystic raptures to the master but also fills his life with desire to live. The unfortunate killing of Imrat shatters the master’s surroundings and after fulfilling the disciple’s only wish of singing song at Amir Rumi’s tomb, he commits suicide. The author has used Tariq Mia to help the bureaucrat “… understand the ways of human heart” (RS 50). Songs of Amir Rumi and Kabir evoke great spiritual bliss among the readers and the miserable ending of the story creates a state of depression. Through this story, Gita Mehta has highlighted the importance of love and the existing human psyche of jealousy in one’s life. The same theme of love has been produced differently in the Musician’s story. In this story various types of
love have been highlighted i.e. the parental love, the devotional love and the passionate desire of love. The world’s finest Veena player, Master Musician, puts his extremely ugly daughter in tough musical training so that music becomes her second nature. Through music he tries to liberate her from the burden of her physical ugliness. In order to provide perfection in music he also evokes the suppressed feelings of womanhood inside her with the help of a young aspiring musician whom he has accepted to teach only on condition of marrying his daughter with him. During the training of both the students Master musician makes them understand the meaning of being a man and a woman. He explains them about the eternal love between Lord Shiva and Parvati and also about the origin of Veena.

The condition of marriage for tutelage inflames the suppressed desire of love in the daughter musician which pushes her to the unscalable height of perfection. On the night of Shiva, their singing spreads ecstasy all around, on which the Master musician announces, “Tonight I gave my daughter in marriage to music. I have fulfilled my duties as a father. Now I free this young man from our bargain. But if he still wishes to marry my child, the wedding can take place whenever mywife wishes” (RS 224).

Delineating this strange story, the author might have wished to show the importance of love in one’s life. Young disciple of Master musician has been presented as a reflection of nature; the counterpart of daughter musician, who evokes the desire of love in her and perfects her. Gita Mehta is of the view that complete surrender to any training pushes
one to the unscalable height of perfection. Concern of musician parents for their ugly daughter to settle her in their own ways reflects the parental love; young musician’s conditional learning spreads sense of devotional love while daughter musician shows the suppressed instinct of being loved. The author has exuberantly handled the simple stuff of love well-knitted around the daughter musician with the philosophical approach. The story ends with a statement of daughter musician, who says, “I must understand that I am the bride of music, not of musician” (RS 225-226).

Betrayed by the man she loves, daughter musician forswears music and later on tries to reconcile and establish her lineage with life on the bank of the river Narmada, just like the Jain Monk, who reveals the mysteries of life only after renouncing the world. Ashoka, a multi-millionaire diamond merchant renounces everything to adopt the cardinal discipline of Jainism and becomes a Jain Monk. The author putsforth the philosophical concept of renunciation as the celebration of the connection with the world, which can be estimated from the words of Jain monk to the bureaucrat when he says, “Don’t ask me to do this, my friend. I am too poor to renounce the world twice” (RS 41).

In the Executive’s story also we can trace love playing a crucial role, but this time it’s all about the love of flesh. The young executive Nitin Bose being exhausted by the hustle of life opts mythical tea estate as his work place. In due course of time he is trapped in enchantment and
starts inflaming with lust. In this state he feels “... pierced by all five arrows of desire” (RS 126) and starts wondering and enjoying Rima, a tribal woman every night. In the drunken state he imagines her like a half-serpent woman coiling limbs around him. Before the final departure in the night of lunar eclipse, she captures his soul and leaves him without senses. Later on by performing some rituals on the banks of the river Narmada, suggested by the tribal priest, he came back to his good health.

The Courtesan’s Story is all about the desire of love. In this story the effect of love is so pervasive that even the most dreaded bandit of Vindhyas, Rahul Singh, is unable to check his intensity of love for the Courtesan’s daughter. He believes that she had been his wife in so many lives before and is the only reason for her abduction. Gradually daughter courtesan realizes the superiority of the bandit’s love over all her tests and admits, “... there was a greater art than all my arts, the ability to love someone as he loved me” (RS 184). Many times the bandit risks his life for the sake of their love and at last he is killed by police. They live a very short life together. After Rahul Singh’s death, daughter courtesan drowns herself into the river Narmada as homage to their eternal love.

The ultimate story of love produced by the author is all about the search of truth and its relevance in one’s life. Naga Baba and the river minstrel extend the devotional thoughts of the author on the river Narmada and also on their lives. After enduring extreme disciplines and fasting for several days and nights Naga Baba becomes an accomplished martial
ascetic. Performing the duties of a protector sadhu, he saves a girl child from brothel and turns her into a learned river minstrel. While shaping the spiritual life of the girl, Naga Baba too becomes a true Naga and explores the secrets of life. Shankaracharya’s the song of the Narmada has been presented to help us understand and establish the relationship between man and nature. In the song of the Narmada, Gita Mehta appears to present her thoughts on convergence of lives rather than alienation or renunciation. Naga Baba realizes the great secret of acceptance of life and reincarnates as Professor Shankar, a renowned archaeologist. Enlightened Professor Shankar produces the gist of his search to the vanaprasthi narrator, “You have chosen the wrong place to flee the world my friend” (RS 268) and explains life as the most precious possession of all human beings by saying, “Don’t you know the soul must travel through eighty-four thousand births in order to become a man?” (RS 281) The experiences and conclusions of the Naga Baba point out that performing one’s worldly duties is the highest devotion for striving enlightenment.

A River Sutra owes variety, vitality and facts around the river Narmada to evoke its timeless image. The novelist considers the Narmada Pilgrimage as one of the holiest and toughest pilgrimages for the devotees, as they have to cover a distance of eight hundred kilometers walking from Amarkantaka to the Arabian Sea i.e. from its origin to the end. The author has described many tribal myths which evoke great strength of the river Narmada. The tribals of Vano worship the feminine force, river Narmada
in the form of stone Goddess, half-woman and half-serpent. They believe in great annulling power of the goddess and also recite an invocation to the river. Their belief is supported by incorporating many archaeological, mythological and historical facts around the river.

The novelist has conceived the river Narmada as a beautiful daughter of Lord Shiva with powers of nullifying the effects of snakebite and providing moksha to their devotees. The river Narmada has been hailed as a motherly figure by the native tribals. In The Minstrel’s story, Naga Baba has named the girl child as “Uma” and claims her as the daughter of river Narmada stating, “The Narmada claims all girls as hers. Tonight you become a daughter of the Narmada” (RS 254). In the Courtesan’s Story, the river has been featured as the grantor of eternity. At the end, the daughter courtesan drowns herself into the river but her mother remains unmoved believing that the river Narmada has purified all her previous sins and her daughter will attain moksha or freedom from the cycle of life and death.

The great reverence for the holy river Narmada and its strength to nullify all kinds of depressions, epileptic and evil effects are reflected in the enigmatic tale of Nitin Bose from the Executive’s story. Here water of the river has been shown with healing power, which frees Mr Bose from the state of being possessed. Gita Mehta writes: “The Serpent in the question is desire. Its venom is the harm a man does when he is ignoring the power of desire” (RS 143). It represents that in the life of modern man
serpent is the symbol of desire and everyone must have to provide it with a respectable position. The suppression of desires may create uncontrolled problems in life. It is realized by Nitin Bose that all creative acts are possible only with desire so he decides to accept the post of director and go back to Calcutta. Here the author again establishes her point that a person who had chosen the isolation of tea-estate finally realized the importance of living in the world. Many myths on desire have been produced by the author, according to one, the great ascetic Lord Shiva rejected Kama’s power (desire) and was warned by the gods with the words: “... he too must feel desire for without desire the play of the worlds would cease” (RS 97). Likewise, local tribals acknowledge desire as “… the dark forces of the jungles” (RS 98) and is “… the first-born seed of the mind” (RS 98). All these philosophical thoughts are packed with the decorum of tribals’ myths and customs.

Eastern mystic religion has always been the centre of curiosity for the men of the modern world. The author establishes that it might be the cause of encounter between the East and the West. In Karma Cola, Gita Mehta has presented irresistible attraction of the Westerners towards Hindu religion, while in A River Sutra she has glorified the strength of the river Narmada; a small entity of the real mystical Eastern land.

In Karma Cola, Gita Mehta has explained Hinduism as a long devotional service through examples of steadfasts practising various paths of devotion for self-transcendence. The author has portrayed the
Westerners’ pilgrimage to the mystic East and the spiritual bedlams experienced by them in Indian ashrams. By producing facts with sheer force and originality she has emphasized on performing one’s *karma* or duties with perfect coordination between thoughts and actions.

The very famous teachings of Bhagvad Gita on *karmayoga*, which the author has proposed in *Karma Cola* expounds itself in *A River Sutra*. Professor Shankar, Naga Baba of previous life, surfaces again, only after realizing the philosophy of life which lies in action, quest, devotion and survival rather than renunciation. In *A River Sutra* the river Narmada provides unity while the six stories give multiplicity. Here, the author has established faith in interdependence of lives through Shankaracharya’s composition “The Song of The Narmada”. After meditating on the song of the Narmada, Naga Baba realizes the core philosophy of Hinduism “The Unity in Diversity” and reenters the life as Professor Shankar.

Hinduism, the prominent feature of Gita Mehta’s writings in *Karma Cola* and *A River Sutra* establishes itself completely in her latest book *Eternal Ganesha*.

In *Eternal Ganesha*, Lord Ganesha has been immortalized as the figure of great religious value to Hindu pantheon. He propagates the supreme goal of Hindu metaphysics “The Unity in Diversity” by being composite of contradictory creatures elephant and mouse, and serpent and man, which promotes the moral imperative of living peacefully in
co-existence. He is the OM-kar, a sole image to meditate upon. According to Hindu philosophers, Ganesha’s head symbolizes the supreme reality of existence, while body symbolizes the illusion of existence or *Maya*. It is believed that meditation on figure of Ganesha helps the scholar to get enlightenment and liberation from all the desires. He also symbolizes the cycle of death and rebirth, which is enacted during Ganesha Chaturthi celebration and culminates with the immersion of Ganesh’s idols. Gita Mehta suggests that the world is thought to have reached a nadir of wickedness and Ganesha has incarnated among us on 21 September 1995, to cleanse the world from wickedness.

Gita Mehta, being a member of freedom fighter’s family has strong concern for her motherland India. This trait prompted the author to glorify as well as give an authentic account of the historical, social, cultural and political picture of India before the whole world. It is well-known that India has always been the subject of interest of many Commonwealth and a few American writers. But only a few of them rub shoulders with Gita Mehta who have succeeded in expressing themselves correctly on India with filtered truth and great artistic skill. Gita Mehta’s *Raj* and *Snakes and Ladders* are the examples of those writings which provide us with an opportunity to understand and estimate Indian history and politics closely.

*Raj* documents the history of India from the end of 19th century to a few years after independence. It chronicles the effect of the British Raj
both upon the princely states as well as upon the personal life of an Indian princess, Jaya Devi. Actual historical convulsions to liberate the nation have been portrayed along with the liberation of an Indian princely woman who rocked the existing structure of the society. The author has also blended the contribution of the Colonial authorities and the state rulers, who used their powers to manipulate people and evolve new ruling policies.

*Raj* begins in the year 1897 when Indian desert kingdoms were affected by severe drought and in the same year the Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. Gita Mehta has mentioned the grandeur of Diamond Jubilee Procession at the cost of India’s wealth. At that time the rulers of princely states were compelled to purchase the shares as a veiled threat. In order to guard the state of Balmer Maharaja Jai Singh also did the same and accepted the imposed treaty. Such dictatorship of the British Empire made Indian rulers docile and passive and created resentment in them, against their rulers which later on became spurt for the freedom struggle. Gita Mehta has mentioned that the attitude of the British Empire towards Royal India had never been acknowledging and they had always treated Indian kings as their recalcitrant children. The novelist has geared up a chronological account of Independence struggle with the Royal Proclamation of 1919. Independence movement started as the Indian rulers came together against the proclamation to demand the Home Rule or self-government in India.
The introduction of Rowlatt Acts, launching of Non-cooperation movement, Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, various oppressive orders and upsurge against the Simon Commission have been dealt with accurate historical details. She has portrayed the unrest and dissatisfaction of monarchs and other people in her fictional web. Various demonstrations against the British Empire including the bomb explosion by Bhagat Singh has been incorporated by the author.

The last section of Raj presents socio-political upheavals and launching of Civil Disobedience Movement, breaking of Salt Law, failure of Cripps Mission, launching of Quit India Movement along with Hindu-Muslim antagonism and Independence tainted with partition. The incidence of partition has been delineated with a picturesque description of the migration of people and their sufferings. Post-independence incidents dealt with in the novel are Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination, merging of Royal Indian Kingdoms into the United India through the Instrument of Accession, enforcement of the constitution of India and finally preparation of the first general elections in the independent India. Gita Mehta has also mentioned *privy-purse* settlements which completely abolished the concept of rulership in 1970-71.

With the chronological documentation of Indian history the story of Princess Jaya Devi moves, who establishes herself after struggling against her staggering destiny. The protagonist witnesses rapid changes in social, cultural and moral norms of the society. She has been modelled to explore
and project the vital areas of individual consciousness, which promote changes rather than transformation. Princess Jaya Devi is portrayed as a dignified woman who remains passive and accepts the dominance of men but when required proves herself better than others in the society. Throughout the novel Jaya Devi continues her process of learning and in an atmosphere of bewilderment and confusion becomes confident, bold and capable of surviving against all odds.

The daughter of Indian renaissance, Jaya Devi has been raised with the traditional as well as the modern system of education. Throughout the novel she is found oscillating between her traditional norms and modernity but her every action seems to be guided by tradition. *Raj* provides us with a potential forum for discussion of the decadent and obnoxious social structure with the dominance of men. Princess Jaya projects diverse thoughts of endurance rather than escapism. She endures the loss of her father, brother, husband and even her son, but continues to serve her motherland. Social setting, realistic incidents and diligent delineations heighten the worth of fictional creation, *Raj*. Naresh K. Jain writes:

Jaya is truly Janus-faced looking back to the past and looking forward to the future. She is a battle-scarred woman who does not remain locked in the memories of past glory but is ready to seek new pastures in the fiercely competitive world of national politics. (213)
The novel reflects some traits of postcolonial writings which are connected with resistance against the Colonial authority and their exploitative ideologies. In the beginning of the novel when Maharajah Jai Singh prepares for his visit to England the intentions of Britain are mentioned, “Maharaj, be cautious. Britain cripples us with her greed....The Angrez are weaving a spider’s web of power from which we will never disentangle ourselves” (R 6). For the welfare of Balmer’s residents Maharajah decides to sell his precious possession ‘Navratan’ to the Tsar of Russia, “So the farmers don’t have to sell their land to the Angrez companies at unreasonable prices” (R 37). During World War I, Indian army of one million soldiers fought bravely with the British Army. They displayed determination and devotion within their limited resources as they, “… live in trenches dug into hard winter mud, sheltering like rats against enemy guns” (R 122). To protect themselves from German’s poison gases, soldiers used urine soaked handkerchiefs, “… no gas masks and have to cover our faces with handkerchiefs soaked in Urine” (R 130). These contributions of the Royal India have not been taken into account by the historians that provide a forum for the postcolonial studies. Along with this various oppressive orders, selfish strategies, rigorous press censorship and settlements for the benefits of the British Empire have also been mentioned by the author. A. Mohamed Mustafa writes:

Mehta has also written on the environmental exploitation of the British, which very few writers have touched upon. “Three
hundred leopards to fight three hundred wild boar for the Prince of Wales’ entertainment.” and “... in Sirpur the Prince of Wales shot six tigers in a single day.” (77)

The author has not only exposed the tyranny of the British Empire but also highlighted their contribution in India’s progress. Through James Osborne the novelist has focused that all British were not alike. About Lord Irwin Major Osborne states: “These natives don’t deserve a Viceroy like Lord Irwin. The man’s a bloody saint–still trying to talk parliament into holding a Round Table Conference so that Indians can be heard in England by the King Emperor himself” (R 354).

Explaining Jaya about the importance of Round Table Conference and Lord Irwin’s benevolence Major Osborne states:

We British are not all monsters, Bai-Sa. Inspite of attempts on his life, and deep resentment back in England, Lord Irwin is about to release Gandhi and invite him to talk at Viceroy’s House. No Indian has ever been received as an equal by the Viceroy. Half of the England will call Irwin a traitor. (R 386)

In favour of Federation he says, “Of course I do, Bai-Sa. Many of us who love this great country want Federation, including the present Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin” (R 315).

By issuing threats to the Royal India about joining Federation by September 1939, Britishers forced them to become an integral part of
United India. James Osborne tells Jaya; “Don’t you Indian rulers ever tire of self-pity, Bai-Sa? The Viceroy has exhausted every avenue in urging you to save yourself from dying in the past you all love so well. Now he has been forced to give an ultimatum” (R 412).

All these citations help us to estimate the author’s views on the benevolence of the British Empire and their contribution in emergence of United Democratic India. Various other developments mentioned during the Colonial period are railways, shares, electricity, modern irrigation techniques, telephones, radio, planes and many other modern amenities. Usha Bande has praised the writing skill of Gita Mehta in these words:

Without being involved in their world, Gita Mehta lets them expose themselves by their roles rather than by letting her rhetoric tilt in favour of one or the other. It is for us to judge whether the British were oppressive or the Nationalists were a boring lot or the rulers were ineffective. (243)

The novel reflects Gita Mehta’s balanced perspective of writing. She has used her thoughts and language in the direction of establishing human relations in the society and nourishing and preserving culture.

In Raj Gita Mehta has used the technique of historical fiction which uses historical events to complement the story. Her technique of providing historical details through the narrative evokes quality of a documentary among the readers. It provides a sense of realism with utmost sincerity and
subtlety of subject matter. Brilliant use of technique has helped the author
to present fictional segment persuasively along with the historical
happenings of India.

After sufferings and sacrifices, Gita Mehta’s concern for her nation
and its development can be navigated through her collection of essays the
Snakes and Ladders. In these essays she has conveyed the progress of
India in the fifty years of independence. The essays provide us with a
scope to assess what we have achieved since Independence and where we
have failed. The essays revolve around the leading politicians of the nation
and their policies. The assessment made by her is pragmatic as well as
unflinching with her level-headed style of expression.

The book contains the prose highlighting the achievements of the
nation like self-sufficiency in food production, rapid industrialization,
textile markets, self-financing institutions and many more but the glories
of success are overshadowed by the problems of poverty, illiteracy,
increase in population and corruption challenging the world’s largest
democracy mentioned by the author. Snakes and Ladders is stuffed with
the assessment of various government programmes launched from time to
time and their impact on common people. During the first decade of
independence emphasis was given on rapid industrialization to replace the
slow growing economy. Many proud gigantic hydro-projects were planned
neglecting the agriculture which resulted in perilous food conditions. In
the decade of sixties the Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri
noticed food as the topmost priority and due to his efforts the crop production broke through. The scientists of Indian Agriculture developed high yielding varieties of staple food and initiated the Green Revolution. With this, the world’s analysts were of the view that India was ready for her economic take off. All these gains of sixties became ephemeral in the decade of seventies. Obsessive centralization of power during the period of Mrs Indira Gandhi’s Prime Ministership proved lethal resulting in price hike of essential commodities, unemployment, labour migration and failure of various government programmes. The author has also evaluated the programmes implemented by the government to reveal the readers about their successes and shortcomings. In the eighties, after Mrs Indira Gandhi’s assassination when Mr Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India, the economy once again started reflecting signs as if the Indians were going to get rid of poverty but it did not work as more emphasis was given on political schemes rather than economic policies. By the nineties, V.P. Singh became the successor of Mr Rajiv Gandhi and exhibited less concern for economic development as subsidies were deducted due to heavy international loans. After V.P. Singh, Prime Minister Narsimha Rao delicately handled the market economy and opened a new arena for the private sector. Many Universities and industries were developed but they failed to match the requirements of employment, which resulted in brain-drain.
In *Snakes and Ladders*, the government policies and related criticism have been handled with utmost care, dedication and sincerity by the author. Throughout the book she remains very level-headed in her assessment and critical in her examination to present the real picture of contemporary politics of her motherland, India.

Before withdrawal, it becomes mandatory to confront with the allegations made by the critics on Gita Mehta and her writings. Like any other non-resident Indian writer she has been charged with selling Indian realities and myths to the West. Indira Bhatt writes:

… a designer effort for the West and confirms that stereotyped image of India that the West admires so much. The Western critics and readers admire the spiritualism, exoticism and the myths of Gods and Goddesses on one hand and on the other wonder about the sex-starved Indians. Mehta caters to the Western critics image the spiritual India with all her mysticism, tribal rituals, courtesans, bandits, gods and goddesses… (76)

Whereas, E. Galle has refurbished her creativity with the traditional pattern of Hindu existence. According to Hindu beliefs everything in the nature is believed to have life and is related with human beings. Galle enthusiastically praises Gita Mehta’s writings as the representation of Hinduism’s core philosophy. He expresses:
Animism is presented in relation to Hinduism on the one hand and humanism on the other, remembering that Humanism is also viewed in relation to Hinduism. The point Gita Mehta wants to make is that the beliefs and customs are part of the invaluable heritage of India to be somehow integrated into modern humanism. (28)

Likewise, expressing the holy river ‘Narmada’ a ‘whore’ has been a source of resentment for many. In A River Sutra Dr Mitra states, “Did you know ‘narmada’ means ‘whore’ in Sanskrit?” (RS 150) Over this sarcastic comment the narrator replies, “That’s impossible. The Narmada is the holiest river in India” (RS 150).

Supporting the explanation made by the narrator on the Narmada, R.S. Pathak stands along with the narrator who establishes ‘Narmada’ as the holiest river in India. He writes, “The novelist rather incorrectly translates the word ‘Narmada’ as ‘whore’. And she approvingly cites the verses composed by Shankaracharya” (120). It seems that through the words of narrator Gita Mehta has tried to wipe away the rumours which the people like Dr Mitra float among the people.

The writings of Gita Mehta are quite balanced in its perception and presentation. Her mode of expression, selection of words and portrayal of facts are aphoristically handled with the great journalistic skills. All her creativities can be estimated as the translations of personal experience and
sincere research. These qualities of such an exuberant writer had checked all the avenues to encounter harsh criticism.

As mysticism, spirituality, religion and facts about India are much praised and readable topics of the West, Gita Mehta is acclaimed more in the West. Her treatment of Indian subject with simplicity has failed to gather large readings in India. This resulted in publication of critical reviews less in numbers as well as a full length study of Gita Mehta’s writings has not been attempted yet by any writer in a single book form. The present research attempts to recompense this inadequacy in the criticism of Gita Mehta. For this purpose all her writings are picked up for research work which is valued for Indianness and Hinduism.

The present research explores a full length study of all of her fictional and non-fictional writings and portrays the various aspects representing the contemporary social life. It attempts to explore the unrevealed layers of meanings stuffed with myriad philosophical thoughts. Her writings continue to be the source of new exploration and new aspects of study. During the research, it is found that her writings have various invocations from Puranas and metaphysical ideas. Uma parameswaran also mentions the sources of these invocations:

The novel cites and adapts verses from the Puranas: “Saraswati purifies us in three days and Ganga in one day, but the moment we see Narmada we are purified (Padma Purana Ch. 13). The
waters of the Ganga will purify the bather in the course of a single day, but the mere sight of the Narmada absolves a man from all sins. (*Agni Purana*, Ch. 113). (264)

This aspect generates an arena for further studies. Hence it is suggested that her works can be evaluated in terms of Indian religious philosophy also.

Gita Mehta’s writings make it apparent that she has successfully established herself as an international cross-cultural critic in the world literary scenario. Her criticism on modern life is focused on the shallowness of spiritual, political and secular lives. She has used scrupulous language avoiding prejudices and anger in order to safeguard her observations and distortion of perceptions. Gita Mehta’s sense of Indianness is not limited up to socio-political study of the modern India. She has also tried to explore the mystical, spiritual, historical, cultural, philosophical and religious India of diverse perspectives. Through her writings she has revealed an unexplored aspect of her motherland, India’s rich multiculturalism with great concern and admiration.