

ETHNIC IDENTITY IN RAMA MEHTA'S *INSIDE THE HAVELI*

DR. P. R. BHABAD

ARTS, COM & SCI. COLLEGE
NANDGAON, NASHIK, INDIA

Abstract

The Post-Colonial era, full of struggles and conflicts for identity and status, has been identified with the double consciousness- the native spirit and the westernized progressive attitude while establishing and maintaining the ethnic spirit of the nation. In India, the social and political conflicts have been the reflections of the reflections of the socio-political reformations. The modernization i.e. westernization brought the concepts of individualities and consciousness of life values of standardization; however, the native national or ethnic spirit could keep its hold to retain the customs and the traditions as the native cultural values as the national ethnic identity. This tempo of social transition and efforts for continuing the self-esteemed and self-evaluated life patterns in India has been the gist of the Indian English novel as in Rama Mehta's projection in 'Inside the Haveli' by propounding the cultural dilemmas. Geeta, a central figure is placed in the identified interesting Indian family in the haveli. This is the representation of the tissues and issues of the Indian society and its ethnic identity after the socio-cultural distortion by the British rule.

Key words: double consciousness, ethnic spirit, social transition, self-esteemed ethnic identity, socio-cultural distortion etc.

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Introduction

The Post-Colonial era is the period of struggle for identity and status in the different spheres of life in India. After the independence, we all Indians were conscious about our individualities, our social and economic status, national identity and integration, and our efforts for establishing India as an independent nation. It was the influence of the long lasted British Empire and its power that exploited and distorted the socio-cultural spirit of the native heritage. Besides the political independence, it was of the movement for social reformation by maintaining the national cultural heritage and national integration. The native customs, traditions, and status have been the markers of the ethnic spirit, and the modern or western ways for the human up-lift-ment should be the progressive variables for these changing life situations in India. This scene has been the reflection in Indian writing in English in general and Indian English Fiction in particular.

Indian Ethos

The national movement for India's political freedom was not restricted only to the separate national identity; but extended to the consciousness of social reformation in terms of national cultural values, customs, traditions and the mother-India syndrome. For every writer has tried to support and contribute this movement through their tools the same. Not only the political and social thinkers, but the creative writers have revealed the dire need for these changes by nativizing the modern or western materialistic life values and removing the socio-cultural evils prevailing in the forms of customs and traditions. Indian society consists of a number of norms and restraints confining mostly women and suffocating the spirit of humanity. All this required re-thinking, re-making and re-establishing approach that the modern

Indian intellectuals have thought of. The literature after the Independence appears to be the source of information about the history of social transition.

Rama Mehta's Novel

Rama Mehta's novel is both protecting and protesting at its core. It is the conscious-raising activity where the observer becomes important or aloof. The readings of our social, cultural and intellectual realities depict her consciousness and intensity or urge for bringing out the strengths and weaknesses of our society. Her world of novel is simply the projection of the Indian geographic-physical background and the humanities settled down against it. All her effort is to create the natural social atmosphere by portraying the individualities, their life-conditions, their views on life and the world, and the issues or problems. She wants to restore the beauty and the dignity of the regional, national customs and traditions. However, she criticizes the fruitlessness and futility of the age-old conventions and drudgery. She glorifies the regional history of the Ranas of the Mewad region of Rajasthan in 'Inside the Haveli' and the aristocracy of the haveli's masters and the mistresses. The social hierarchy at the gender level and the social class or economic level marks the social divisions and the differences. The writer exploits these distinctions to show the mistakes and mysteries worries and miseries of Indian women. In the lives of the women, education and self-reliance can bring about change and improvement; for that the women should come forward to participate in the social reformation campaigns like diffusion of education, new values and the changing attitudes. The dignity and the status the writer insists on have been considered by attaching the altered life values.

Infusion of Western Values into Indian Thoughts

No doubt, the post-colonial period is filled up with multicultural and democratic ideas and thoughts. Naturally, liberty, equality, fraternity and justice have become the principles of the common people's life. The eradication of social injustice and expectation of the human life of comfort and content have been the gist of the modern writing. All these solutions or new thoughts

have been derived from the western world. They needed to be adapted and implemented. The Indian novelists in English have tried to convince indirectly or ironically the worries and tensions of the Indian men and women. Rama Mahta, as a woman writer, tries to depict the thoughts and ideology of the great philosophers and social reformers who already stated in their earlier writings. Geeta in 'Inside the Haveli' is the representation of the new modern woman who could get into the unfamiliar life situations and adapts to the age-old customs and traditions by infusing some new life values through education for women and the backward class people. In short, the practically acceptable views on life have been conveyed throughout the novel.

The Haveli and Ethnic Identity

The Sangram Singhji's haveli, the most reputed and dignified haveli in the region is at the centre and the other havelis make the entire ethnic group of commitment, self-esteem and self-evaluation. All of them, including women and the servants have their own standards of living and own ideas of contentment. However, due to the customs and traditions like- early marriage, no re-marriage and so lifelong widowhood, no education for women, discrimination at the gender and economic level and so on, there are the mysteries of women inside the haveli. Spending whole life of widow, Pari, Kanta Bua Sa etc. do not lament on their miseries and do not expect any sympathy or solutions to their problems. They feel safe and secure in the haveli. An authority of decision-making in the haveli matters make them proud of it as if they are the stakeholders of the haveli. And so they never bother their future and separate identities.

The impact of the ancient Indian tradition of haveli has determined the life-patterns of the men and women in there; and so their self-evaluation and concepts of happiness make Geeta follow the norms and restraints though she realizes the follies and weaknesses of the conservative ways of life. The power, dignity and status of the haveli compel Geeta to adapt to them. The contrast between the Bombay modern cosmopolitan view and the Mewad conservatism of the haveli are superbly projected in the novel to point out the seriousness of

the issues to be rectified. The cultural dilemmas are set to show the effective impact of the ethnic identity. It is proved that any powerful influence from the outside may not affect the deep-rooted, self-esteemed, and ever respected life patterns. Although the haveli men and women understand and realize the value of education, the loss of child marriages, or of celebrations or extravagance, they do not admit any change so easily.

Geeta Turns into the Haveli Mistress

Rama Mehta seems neither to be conventional nor to be progressive; but a conscious being who reveals the social and intellectual changes not by replacing all old ones with the new adaptations. She provides an admixture of them that could not be affordable to us. Geeta, an educated independent young woman, struggles to hold on to her identity in a traditional world. She is an enthusiastic girl from the cosmopolitan Bombay community and after her marriage, she is shifted to a conservative family of the aristocrats in the haveli. She has to forget about her independence and progressive view since she finds herself in purdah. However, she manages to maintain the modern values even though she faces with traditions. She tries to carve out an identity for herself in the unfamiliar environment. Thus, the conversion of Geeta into the traditional haveli mistress provides the record of certain pertinent issues that need immediate attention. It becomes the document that throw light on the ethnic issues such as an educated girl finds psychologically well and happy; she finds happiness in the commitment and self-evaluation of the ethnic group. Efforts of Kanwarini Sa, her mother-in-law always cares for the haveli reputation and status for the sake of the haveli master Bhagwat Singhji's name and fame in the region. Geeta is not so acceptable daughter-in-law in the haveli in the eyes of the relatives of the haveli since she does not know the customs and traditions of the haveli. In other words, she is an outsider to the ethnic group. However, she adjusts and adapts to the life situations; maintains the status of the haveli and becomes the chief in the haveli.

The three sections and chapters indicate interval of time and space. The changing situations and new challenges, passing generations and adaptability

of progressive mind are the features of the thematic design of the novel. The old characters in the events are shown with their tug of war in their minds.

To reach at this status and identity, Geeta struggles to infuse the modern thoughts and ideas to change the conventionality of this ethnic group. She dislikes the celebrations and extravagance; she dislikes the purdah and other taboos; she gets irritated with the child marriages; she is unhappy with the discrimination at the class level or the gender level. She wants to educate and make all of them aware of real content. Her classes for the servant girls and Ravi like boys, her insistence for sending Sita to school show her urge for changing the society around her. But most of the changes we find in Geeta and they are- i) her anger or irritation turns into sympathy or affection, ii) her protest and progressive attitude turns into the feeling of protective and rather conservative at the end of the novel and ii) her sense of alienation turns into the oneness and affiliation with the ethnic group of the haveli. She lives happily with Ajay there as the haveli requires her there to take care of.

Conclusion

Thus, ethnic identity in 'Inside the Haveli' is found in Geeta's psychological well-being. She thinks and finds herself linked with the committed and self-relying people. She saves herself from depression and gets happiness in the commitment and affiliated community. The haveli is the centre of all happenings where the masters and the mistresses, the servants and their relatives live jointly to support each other. As a representative Indian English novel, 'Inside the Haveli' by Rama Mehta is the best example of the projection of the importance of ethnic identity.

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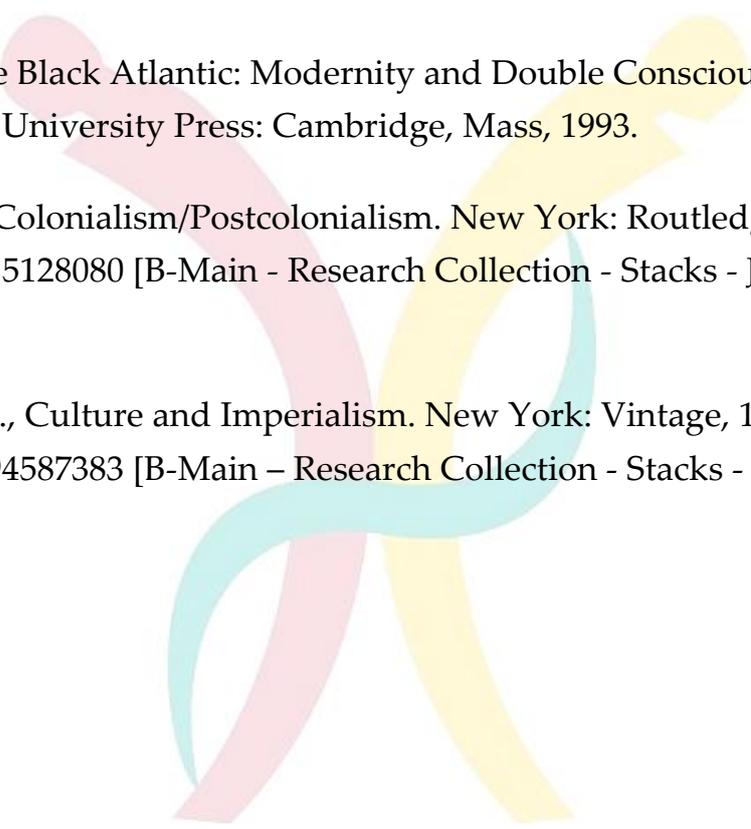
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