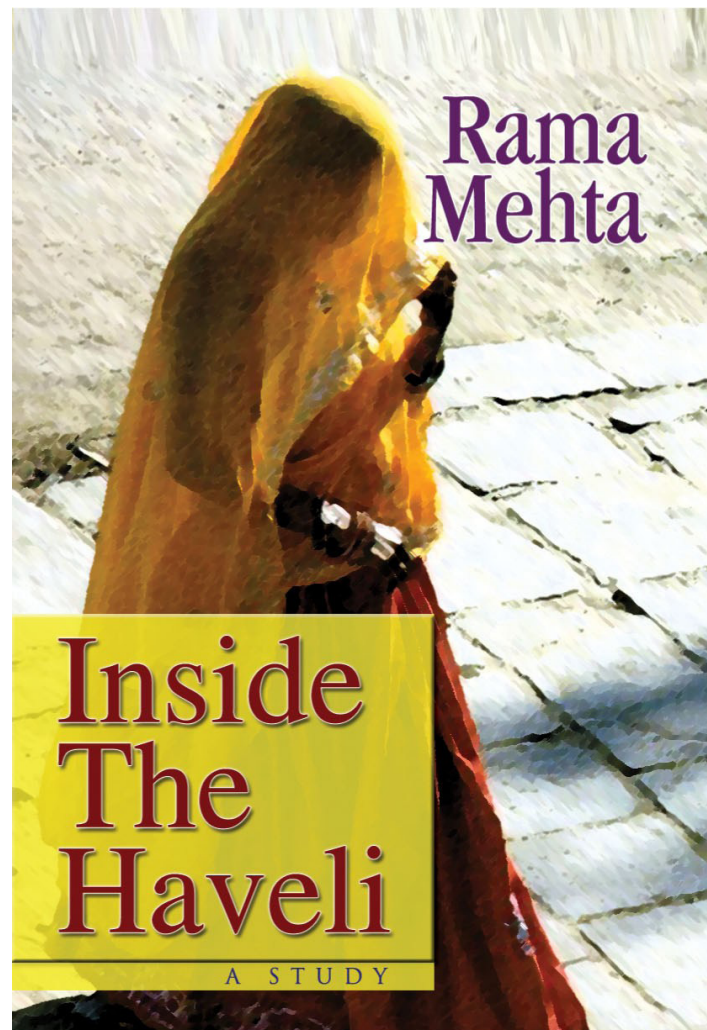


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THE REFLECTION OF INDIAN SOCIETY IN RAMA MEHTA'S INSIDE THE HAVELI



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ABSTRACT:-

Rama Mehta, a prominent Indian Socialist female writer in her Sahitya Academy Award (1978) winning novel 'Inside the Haveli' portrays the personal and the observed experience of an Indian Haveli Life, its Culture, History, Tradition, Purdah and the Social System in her semi-autobiographical work. The focus of the paper is to know the varied glory of the Haveli, its Feudal Structure, the Social and Individual Life, the Rituals and Festivals, and the deep rooted Customs etc. delineated in the novel.

Keywords: Purdah, Feudal Structure of the Haveli, Glory, Composite Culture, Ancient Tradition

There is the great fusion of various cultures in India and it has been foot printed by the historical record of the different invaders. Indian religions, languages, food, costume and customs differ from place to place within the country. Each region has its own tradition and customs and is distinct from the rest part of the country. The thousand years of Indian history tell the cultural diversity in the country. People from the different corners of the world come to India and get assimilated with the way of life in India and from it emerges the composite Indian culture. People from the different communities such as Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, and Parsis etc. live in India and each community has its distinct cultural, social system, and tradition. One of such community and its culture is reflected in the form of a novel *Inside the Haveli* (1977) written by the well-known sociologist Rama Mehta. Her novel is basically a documentary one of the Rajasthan region in India. It gives an insight of the cultural and the historical importance of the place.

The novel *Inside the Haveli* is set in Udaipur of Rajasthan region which has its own history and famous for the various havelis. The city was once the capital state of Mewar having decorated with Lake Pichola and the beautiful background hills of Sajjangarh of the Aravali range of mountains. The city has four gates including beautiful palaces and havelis. The owner of the haveli in the novel is Sangram Singhji, a minister of king of Mewar. The writer describes the havelis of the Udaipur in the very first chapter of the novel-“These gates were huge with metal spikes on each panel.” (04). The region has 300 years of tradition and the glaring richness of the city is the splendid tradition of havelis and its social system. The history states that the country was ruled by numerous invaders specially the Britisher and the Moghuls. They put their impression in the form of glory, dignity, rituals and code of conduct.

The word ‘Haveli’ originally a Persian means a mansion or a large house. One of the definitions in an exhibition on havelis in the Prince of Wales Museum (1989) gives the exact idea of the large house called ‘havelis’. It states that- “By the way, a haveli generally means a mansion. But in totality, it symbolizes generation who articulated their life-style that includes architecture, customs and manners, of course arts, crafts and music. The havelis however are the official residence of umraos, princes, thakurs and others such as dhabhai, purohit and sethji who were given a special status by the Rana.” Jeewan Niwas, the name of the haveli has grown up many centuries. It was “like a banyan tree, once it had taken root it spread” (06). Sangram Singhji’s haveli has many courtyards with many rooms. Rama Mehta describes: “The haveli has no real shape to it; the marble and stone seemed to have been hastily piled on top of one another. It expanded through the years but without any plan, it recedes in places leaving empty land, and yet it pushes out in other direction... The haveli may have no shape from the outside, but inside there is a definite plan” (06).

The novel depicts various rituals and festivals. Geeta an outsider is surprised when she looks the celebration in the haveli with great hospitality and grand manner and feels proud to be a daughter-in-law of the noble family. When she comes to live in the haveli, she is informed by the main maid about the richness of the family by saying that- “to Geeta it had seemed that the whole city belonged to her-in-laws. Every gate they passed, the maids sat up erect and with pride pointed to a house that belonged to the family.” (18) Birth, marriage and the death ceremonies are celebrated with grand manner. “In the courtyards for three hundred years, birth, marriage and death ceremonies had been performed.” (59-60) Every occasion is celebrated with proper arrangement. Relatives and honorable people are invited with respect and courtesy. Professional artists are arranged to sing and to dance. They entertain the guests. The gifts and presents were given to the guests, servants and

others as a part of celebration. Each member of the haveli prepares with aristocratic fame and features. Their costumes are aristocratic having coats of silk and tight fitting pants and having colourful turbans on their heads. "The professional singing group had arrived and started to serenade the ancient house of Sangram Singhji. The families of these women had served the havelis for several generations, singing and dancing on festive occasion." (36)

The Jiwan Niwas haveli is having so many servants and maids. Generation after generation, they have been serving to the master of the haveli and his family. They feel proud to serve the great family and being part of it. All those who serve the haveli are considered the members of the family and honoured with the same respect and affection. The marriages of their daughters are celebrated or done by the master or mistress of the haveli. Among so many servants, Pariji an old main maid distributes the work among other maids as per the permission of the mistress of the haveli. She also guides Geeta the protagonist of the novel to how to behave, how to look, even how to talk. Women are respected and they are called 'ji' or 'sa'. These words have special meanings in Indian context. 'Sa' is the short form of 'Sahiba' and 'ji' is added to the name in order to name him/her with special respect. Here, Geeta is also named as 'Binniji' and an old maid as 'Pariji'. 'Sa' or 'Ji' is added as a mark of respect. Even the relatives are addressed as Kaki sa, Mami sa, Bua sa and Bai sa in a typical Rajput manner and it is unique in Indian culture.

Geeta remembers how she was welcomed and blessed with the words, "May you have many, many sons and may you always wear red". In Indian tradition, these two blessings are prime having special meaning- to have male progeny and to die before the husband. Every member including the servants does his/her duty with great interest and without complaining. The days pass with love, compassion, honour, mutual care, coordination. Everyone follows its tradition and the cares are taken to observe it properly. Without consulting Minister and the Mistress nobody shackles the walls of the haveli. Without the help of servant, it becomes very hard to manage the life in the haveli. They have their own compartments inside the haveli. There are several servants in the haveli. The male servants were- Gangaram, Hiralal, Khyali and Gokul and maid servants were- Lakshmi, Pari, Dapu, Sarju and so on. Even the children of the servants are sent to the school despite many adversities.

A Persian word 'Purdah' means 'Curtain' and over the years it has become tradition in Rajasthan. It is a must for the daughter-in-law. Vrinda Nabar, Nirja Misra and Uma Parmeswaran in *Margins of Erasure* (1995) speak about the purdah system, respect and honour of the women in Rajasthan. Rama Mehta's portrayal of the life of women in the haveli and specially the purdah system is her research as a sociologist. Her observation of the haveli life and the women in it is reflected in the book *From Purdah to Modernity* where she says that the purdah system provides the security to the women; it also offers the respect and the dignity. She further says that the system does not treat women as slaves but a guardian or safety and it is the part of ancient tradition and family dignity.

Conclusion:

The harmonious environment of the haveli fills with love, concern and warmth. The haveli, thus, proves to an epitome of harmony and tolerance besides the epitome of traditions and past glory which enriches the culture of India.

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