



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

VOLUME - 10 | ISSUE - 7 | APRIL - 2021



LIFE AND WORKS OF GITA METHA

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ABSTRACT

While Indian authors have been making significant contributions to world literature since Independence, the past years have seen an enormous flourishing of Indian fiction in the International development. As Indian authors develop into more popular internationally, many conservative Indians criticize the attention their work invites to social problems in India, with many politicians with less than thrilled about the current explosion in Indian fiction.



KEYWORDS: *Indian authors , International development , conservative Indians.*

INTRODUCTION

Women authors in India are moving forward with their well- built and certain strides, matching the quickness of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work. Yes, they are our women writers. Indian Women writing in English is being recognized as major contemporary current in English language and literature. The likes of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Gosh and Anita Desai have won worldwide praise for the quality of their writing and their imaginative use of English. These contain the role of English as comprehensive lingua franca: the position of English in India. The Indian authors in English are writing, not in their native language but in a second language, and the resultant transcultural character of their texts.

Gone are the days when literary texts are studied in terms of plot, characterization, style etc. Today literary texts are studied from different perspectives which literary critics could not think of in past. The present study makes an attempt to analyze Life and works of Gita Mehta and Manju Kapur from concept of feminism in literature. An Indian writer, Gita Mehta, was born in 1943 to an extremely active in the struggle for Indian liberation from Britain and in a renowned Oriya family. The Oriya, known classically by various names (Odia, Odri, Utkaliya, Kalingi, Latin: Uri), are an ethnic group of eastern India and of eastern Indo- Aryan stock. She is the daughter of Biju Patnaik, an Indian independence activist and a Chief Minister of post-independence Odisha, then known as Orissa. Her younger brother Naveen Patnaik is presently the Chief Minister of Orissa. At her birth, Mehta's grandmother demanded that she be named Joan of Arc, as a child born into a community of freedom fighters who were often forced to go underground as a result of their political actions. But instead, she was named Gita (translated & quot; song & quot;), as in song of freedom. It could also be, let us conjecture, that she was named Gita because her parents were fighting for a just cause and Lord

Krishna's Gita is a thesis on Karma/action. Whatever be the case, Gita probably had something of Joan of Arc intrinsically in her whom she gives to her protagonist Jaya in Raj-self assurance and frankness. Only several weeks after Mehta's birth, her father was imprisoned for his

political activity. Growing up, she was surrounded by her parent active struggle for Indian liberation. At the age of three, she and her brother were sent to a boarding school while her mother followed her father from one jail to the next. When Gita Mehta was five years old, she saw her first dead body. It was Gandhi. She been playing with her brother on a cold January afternoon when the news came over that the Mahatma had been shot dead by one of his own Hindu guards. Even now she remembers the shock of seeing her mother and the family servants weeping beside the ireless that brought the news. More significantly, she remembers sitting on someone's shoulders among the weirdly silent crowds standing four-deep alongside the funeral route, watching as a lorry, surmounted by garlands of marigolds, carried the symbol of Indian freedom to his funeral pyre. She remembered it particularly well when she went to see Gandhi, the Richard Attenborough film, in which the funeral had become a full military job, all slow-marching, uniformed troops and rumbling gun carriages. Later she found out that – wholly against the expressed desire of the master of non-violent protest – a state funeral had been mounted, by Nehru and Mountbatten " for the record "; It this kind of double-vision that Mehta loves to concern within her books: the India seen from the inside by a passionate returned emigrant and the India as sold to the West in images of mysticism, poverty and chaos. She made her name in 1980 with *Karma Cola: The Marketing of the Mystic East*, a blisteringly funny piss-take of consumerism trying to sell Nirvana, of the Beatles calling on the Maharishi, Ravi Shankar at Woodstock... Later she took to fiction, and published *Raj* (a bit of a commercial blockbuster about rich prince ling families looking for love in the run-up to Partition) and *A River Sutra*, a poetic little rhapsody about a retired bureaucrat rediscovering his soul in retirement beside a sacred river. Now, half a century after her country's independence, she back in Tom Wolfe mode with *Snakes and Ladders*, a 35-chapter guide to modern India, taking in politics, economics, autobiography, jokes, history, polemic, anecdote, interviews, race, the arts, literature, caste, and the sex industry, dished up with the airiest of manners. She uses words and phrases from the Raj lexicon – " the imperial jig was up"; Mrs Gandhi being "quite loopy"; something " sticking in the craw ". Amid passionate denunciations of the poverty trap (that keeps, say, illiterate peasants paying off the interest on tiny loans for 20 years) she finds room for vast and alternation pronouncements. " The most interesting evolution of independent India," she writes, " is the change from individual fearlessness in the face of social and political injustice, to the craven courting of those who possess social and political power. " Education: Young Gita was growing up in the thick of political activities that always created fluid situations. Her father was often in jail and her mother followed him 'from jail to jail... smuggling letters into the jail'¹² and running around offices to get him released. In order to ensure stability for their two children, particularly in their education, the parents decided to send them Gita and her brother to a boarding school. Gita received her early education in India. She graduated from Bombay University. Thereafter, she was sent to Cambridge for a Masters in English Literature. She met her future husband Ajai Sonny. After their marriage they settled in London.

In 1987 she shifted to New York where Sonny joined as the Editor-in-chief of the world renowned publishing house Alfred A. Knopf. because of Mr. Mehta's position in the publishing industry, the family holds a prominent place in New York's literary and publishing circle. They married and have one son. Mehta and her husband " Sonny, " the president of Alfred A. Knopf publishing house, currently maintain residences in New York, London and Delhi, spending at least three months of every year in India. As a result of Sonny Mehta's prominent position in New York publishing industry, the couple is a central figure in New York literary publishing world.

Career:

In addition to writing, Mehta has also spent time as a journalist and directed several documentaries about India for BBC and NBC. She has made four films on the Bangladesh war, and for NBC she covered the Indo-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. She has also made films

on elections in the former Indian princely states. Because of this journalistic background, all of her books feature keen political insight founded in thorough investigation. Because of the intelligence and family history that follows Mehta into her writing, her books are smart investigations into the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what has shaped modern India and ultimately, who she is as a woman of Indian descent. She has the unique opportunity to collect the richness of living on three continents, and it is this rarity of perspective that gives her a uniquely witty and frank ability to define her vision of India through her work. As Mehta states, India is a place where worlds and times are colliding with huge velocity: we putting satellites into space, and we have bullock carts; there, that constant tension and contradiction of immense sophistication and an almost pre-medieval way of life.¹³ Her film compilation of the Bangladesh revolution, *Dateline Bangladesh*, was shown in cinema theatres both in India and abroad. In earlier interview, in 1991, responding to the question about her documentaries, she had said: I made four films on the Bangladesh war - I was with the guerillas, the Mukti Bahini, inside Bangladesh. Later, for NBC, I covered the Indo-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. I also made films on the elections in the former Indian princely states... I would charge into the offices of BBC and NBC and ask them, you let Indians make films about India? They were astonished and let me do the films.¹⁴ Gita Mehta's works reflect the insight gained through her journalistic and political background. But besides that she has even written numerous articles for various Indian, American and European magazines. She made documentaries for European and American televisions. Gita Mehta, eminent journalist turned writer nicely combined India's glorious history, culture and spirituality through her novels. Her works have been translated into 21 languages and published in twenty-seven countries. She has been on the bestseller lists in Europe, the US and India. Gita Mehta comments: "I am a camera, and the reader can see through my eyes."¹⁵ Mehta is a witty, opinionated person who is always open to new ideas and experiences. At the age of forty, she did a parachute jump with a British military squadron. But she did not challenge herself with physically taxing adventures in pursuit of eternal youth, she assured Christa Worthington of *Harper's Bazaar* in 1989: "I am an Asian woman...Possibly because one is Indian; it's not terrifying to grow up. As we grow older, we're given more authority and respect."¹⁶ In her piece "Making India Accessible" published in *Publisher's Weekly* in 1997, Wendy Smith describes the Mehtas home thus: Gita and Sonny Mehtas apartment is an oasis of tranquility in midtown Manhattan. Outside on a chilly March day, Park Avenue traffic is at its mid-afternoon worst, and the chatter of kids from a school next door nearly drowns out the honking horns and screeching brakes. Inside, all distracting sounds seem to be absorbed by the crammed floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, custom-built when the couple moved to New York from London in 1987 when Sonny replaced Robert Gottlieb as Knopf editor-in-chief.¹⁷

Gita and Ajay Mehta have a son who lives in London and the family maintains residences in Delhi, New York and London. Despite their otherwise busy schedule, the Mehtas spend at least three months in India. In fact, every winter is a homecoming for them. This time is reserved for family visits and get-togethers. Gita says she does not write during these visits as it is a period reserved for accumulation of experience and assimilation of ideas.

Writing fiction, she says, is not easy, particularly if you are dealing with facts and composing factual pieces. Non-fiction writing provides a kind of beyond which one does not go; not so in fiction where the imagination is at play.

However, the experience in making documentaries gave her freedom to rove about, to collect data and to amass information. As a war correspondent with NBC (USA), she got an opportunity to tour Bangladesh and cover the Indo-Pak War 1971. She saw the birth of the nation. She also made a documentary on elections in the erstwhile princely states. This first-hand knowledge widened her horizon further and her own experiences plus her family background moulded her vision of India and gave her keen insight to understand India's problems, her strength and weaknesses.

When she started writing books, fiction and non-fiction both, she did it with the self-confidence of an insider's familiarity. Because of this journalistic background, all of her books feature keen political insight founded in thorough investigation. Because of writing, her books are smart investigations into

the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what have shaped modern India and ultimately, who she is a woman of Indian descent.

Works of Gita Mehta:

- (1) Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East (1979),
- (2) Raj (1989),
- (3) River Sutra (1993),
- (4) Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India (1997), and
- (5) Eternal Ganesha: from birth to rebirth (2006).

Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East (1979)

Gita Mehta's first book, Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East (1979), took a mocking look at the Western belief that spiritual enlightenment could be acquired instantly by hopping on to a jet and finding the easiest available guru. Karma cola was the starting point of Gita Mehta's literary career. It was by chance that she came upon the idea which she later developed as a theme for her book.

Raj (1989):

Raj, Mehta's first novel, begins during the last years of the nineteenth century. The book Raj (1989) covered the 50 years preceding Indian independence through the fictional character of Jaya Singh, daughter and wife of maharajahs who ruled two of Indias nominally independent kingdoms.

A River Sutra (1993)

Mehta's second novel, A River Sutra, is a more intimate and deeply focused work. The narrative centers on India's holiest river, the Narmada, in the form of a series of tales, or modified sutras of Indian literature. The tales of various pilgrims to the river tap the deep veins of Indian mythology and artistic traditions while also forming a prose meditation on the country's secular-humanist tradition.

Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India (1997)

Gita Mehta's another work Snakes and Ladders, is a collection of essays on India. Captured in these essays is a time-period when India, post-independence, was struggling to establish its identity as a self-sufficient, progressive economy. The forward of the book explains the name given to the book and relates it to the Indian context. The book proceeds with essays on Indian politics, films, myths, popular beliefs, superstitions, love, leisure, décor and other very Indian tidbits.

Eternal Ganesha: from birth to rebirth (2006)

This is the story that Mehta recounts in her book, "Eternal Ganesha" which is a virtual celebration of this wonderful, delightful God who is universally loved as a harbinger of good luck and the remover of obstacles, and for his benign interaction with the affairs of humans. This sumptuous oversized book is laden with 125 color images of the elephant-headed deity who appears just about everywhere from the walls of ancient temples to contemporary art work to posters plastered in the bazaars.

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