

CHAPTER – IV

Conclusion

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The chapters discussed so far put forth Raj as the successful historical novel which is the pen picture of the late 19th and the early 20th century. Raj fulfils every criterion for being categorized as a historical novel which amuses the readers with fictitious story and also informs them about Indian history.

Mehta has picturised every historical event with sparkling historical accuracy. Indian leaders are mentioned in their own period whenever necessary. Ravindranath Tagore, Motilal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Beasant are shown discussing in the meeting at Calcutta. Moreover numbers and names of kings in Raj are almost accurate. Mehta writes:

... If five hundred Indian kings could speak with own voice last year in London, Gandhiji and Jinnah will surely come to an accommodation. ¹

To bring out the reality in the novel, Mehta mentions the names of the kings as:

Flags hung limply above Hyderabad House, Jaipur House, Alwar House, Kashmir House, Bikaner House, Patiala House indicating the presence of those rulers in Delhi. ²

Even the supreme status of the British Resident is described minutely. James Osborne, the British Resident tells Jaya:

... We represent the British Crown in a foreign country.
... But the men who represent the British Empire in the Indian kingdoms have no training in diplomacy or

administration, although they exert as much power as the ruler himself. Perhaps even more, since they can recommend a ruler's abdication.³

All these details show Mehta's deep knowledge of history. Raj has two main themes which can be stated as:

- i) Personal story of Jaya with complex family relations.
- ii) freedom struggle covering almost every significant event.

Alongwith the major themes, the subordinate themes can be drawn as follows :

- i) feminism as Jaya is earlier exploited by her husband and the society but emerges out as the free woman in the end.
- ii) Royal families, indulged in luxurious life.
- iii) Threat of the British Crown and of the reformist's movement to the kingdoms.

Gita Mehta handles these fivefold themes with perfection. Characters, in the novel are portrayed in such a way so as to stick to the theme of the novel. The threads of personal story and freedom struggle are simultaneously woven to recreate the readers and reconstruct the past.

It is not the Protagonist, who advocates nationalism. Maharajah of Balmer, his Maharani, Mrs. Roy and Arun Roy are the main characters who are obsessed with the idea of winning the independence for their motherland. Maharajah of Balmer impresses the reader due to his subject oriented policy and reformist view. His straightforward confession that "Already the Raj believes, I am anti British⁴ indirectly suggests nationalism.

Maharani of Balmer is the unique character whose life is a strenuous journey from Maharani to Sati Mata. She becomes the genuine follower of Gandhiji's principles. Moreover she expresses her determination to Jaya as:

I am free to follow the path of truth, even if it leads to jail.⁵

Mrs. Roy takes Jaya to the nationalistic spots and inform her about nationalism. Since the very beginning, Arun Roy represents the nationalist though he has a strong weakness of immoral behaviour. He prefers to indulge in Shikar and sex with the widow Maharani before addressing Sirpur people. Still, he is shown as enjoying the popularity of the nationalist.

In Raj, Jaya, the central character is shown striving hard to protect her kingdom at any rate from the reformists. Eventually, when there remains no alternative, she merges her kingdom with India. She is neither joyous nor sad when India becomes free.

Throughout her life, Jaya burns like a candle. As she is the protagonist, Mehta portrays every angle of her diverse personality. Though she is married, matrimonial pleasures are always beyond her reach. That's why she appears a dedicated wife while praying for her husband but immoral enough while thinking about Arun Roy and James Osborne on her bed. Her husband Pratap admits:

... You were always such a dutiful little Indian wife, constantly doing pujas for my long life."⁶

However her fascination, towards James Osborne and Arun Roy is revealed:

But sometimes, while her husband laboured above her, the shadow of other men slipped unbidden into her mind. James Osborne's arms around her shoulders, Arun Roy's lips against her skin, and for a moment, her rigid body softened under her husband's.⁷

Though Pratap's rigid behaviour with her is taken for granted, the readers cannot accept the Maharani having fascination for two people at the same time. It is really unbearable. Her sexual intimacy with Arun Roy in jungle is a great shock for the reader.

Maharajah Victor and Pratap stand for vain kings. Mehta creates the character of Lady Modi so as to create honour in the narrative. However the humour, many times hurts the readers as it is based on gossip, related to nationalist movement. She says:

... Gandhiji actually went to Bunkingham Palace wearing a loincloth. I believe Their Majesties just could not take their eyes off Gandhiji's bare knees.⁸

Such poking fun at great personality, in the historical novel is unfair on the part of the readers. The Prime Minister of Sirpur, Sir Akbar has the symbolic significance of Hindu Muslim unity. His tragic death suggests the havoc of the riots which erupted in 1947. Raj Guru of Balmer though a minor character, is a source of 'Raj niti' to Jaya whenever necessary.

Chandani, though minor character, amuses the reader, especially when she reflects King George as a king of untouchables.

Poignant use of language is the most significant characteristic of Raj. Gita Mehta reflects on womanhood as:

Woman is a mood. ⁹

To suggest the mentality of violent mob indulged in riots Mehta writes:

Can you tell from a murderer's eyes what his religion is, baba? These are murderers, drunk on blood. ¹⁰

Such expression lingers in reader's mind for a long time.

Raj reveals all the peculiarities of its age i.e. spread of nationalism, blind imitation of the British done by the people, injustice in British Raj. As historical novel is the document of socio-cultural ethos of the age, Raj is full of historical as well as socio-cultural references. Traditions and customs are minutely reflected in the novel.

As an Indian English novel, Raj has ample of Indian words which create the atmosphere of Indian Society under British reign. Those words are- lathi, hartal, thug, Rajniti, sepoy, paan, purdah, zenana, ustad, rag, guru, Angrez, Bai-sa, durbar, gaddi, nazar, Izzat etc.

Throughout the novel, there are scattered examples of remarkable fusion of fact and fiction as:

Only hours after the Indian national Congress passed its resolution, Jaya stepped into her bathing pool and was almost suffocated by the heavy scent of attar of roses. ¹¹

The title Raj suggests manifold meanings, first as British Raj, secondly Royal Raj, It also means the end of British Raj as well as Royal Raj. Lastly Raj implies awakening of people's 'Raj' which is democracy. Thus Raj is one of the finest novel penned by Gita Mehta.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Gita Mehta, Raj (New Delhi : Penguin Books, 1989) p. 388
2. Ibid., p. 310.
3. Ibid., pp. 314-315
4. Ibid., p. 37
5. Ibid., p. 374
6. Ibid., p. 333
7. Ibid., pp. 287-288
8. Ibid., p. 398
9. Ibid., p. 95
10. Ibid., p. 445
11. Ibid., p. 167