

INTRODUCTION

About the Author

Rama Mehta was born in Nainital in India in 1923. She had her education in Nainital and did her post graduation in Philosophy from Delhi University. She is the first woman to be appointed to the prestigious Indian Foreign Service. Rama Mehta was forced to resign her position as a diplomat when she married Jagat Mehta; himself a member of the diplomatic cadre. Later, she concentrated on sociology. She documented and identified many hidden and silent aspects of Indian family values and traditions. Her works include issues from the socio-political life, history, culture, rural life etc. These are the themes that several Indian English fiction writers have broadly taken up in their works. Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* is not an exception to these features. Her other works are *Ramu, A Story of India* (1966) and *The Life of Keshav* (1969). Mehta's critical essays include "The Western Educated Hindu Woman" (1970) and "The Hindu Divorced Woman" (1975). The principal theme of Rama Mehta's writing is the position of women in a tradition-bound but rapidly changing India. Just before her death in June 1978, Mehta completed her study of women in the Hindu nuclear family.

Plot

The novel presents the saga of Geeta, an educated, lively and spontaneous Bombay girl, who enters the haveli as the bride of Ajay Singh. Geeta finds it hard to adjust and adapt herself to the rigorous and conventional ways of the haveli, in which women observed purdah. Geeta finds herself entrapped and encaged in a vast haveli, encircled all the time by women. She is condemned to a life of self-denial, isolation and utter distress, due to the fault-finding nature of her mother-in-law and other women in the haveli. Geeta, being an independent new woman, initially struggles to maintain her individuality in the traditional world of the haveli but gradually starts to admire its traditions and accepts the warm affection of the people.

Geeta's progressive thoughts help to obtain two important approvals from the conservative family of her husband. These approvals are the right of the girl to education irrespective of her class and the right of the mother to have a say in the marriage of her daughter. This was to prevent child marriage which has a high approval of society. Geeta's

adaptability, compromise and forbearance help to resolve the conflict between tradition and modernity. The concern and care of her husband and relatives also help her to acquire this amalgamation. Geeta appreciates the life in the haveli, adjusts herself to it and becomes its mistress.

Theme

The novel deals with the twin theme of silence and adjustment with the undercurrent of feminine and feminist sensibilities. Inside the Haveli is a beautiful framework of narration tenderness about an ancient and traditional way of life. It is an interesting account of a system that existed since feudal times. The theme of the novel is neither victory nor defeat. It balances the opposite ideas of modernity and tradition with harmony and understanding.

Autobiographical Element

The novel is a skillful presentation of Rama Mehta's keen observation and her autobiography. Like Geeta she has been an open minded, western educated girl with her residence in Udaipur. She presents a vivid picture of a tradition-bound haveli in Udaipur named 'Jeewan Niwas' in which she herself had experienced the restricted and traditional atmosphere of Udaipur; the family home of Jagat Mehta. Geeta's journey of protest, gradual transformation and adjustment among the people and traditions of the haveli bears a lot of resemblance to Mehta's personal life. Rama Mehta presents her experience of Rajasthani culture and lifestyle through her characters.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Haveli is a symbol of oppression that represents the silence of women. The rules of the haveli are as strict as the stones of the haveli that keep women within social boundaries. The haveli is designed in a way that the outer world is denied except occasional glimpses from behind the veil. The purdah though it appears to be a sign of respect, is a dual symbol of control and exclusion. The Haveli masks the inner emotions that show no dissatisfaction on the surface. The wall, that divides Udaipur into two halves, symbolizes tradition and modernity as the old and new cities.

Characterization

It is a method the authors use to create images for the readers. It helps them to understand a character's personality and its effect on other characters. It consists of their physical appearance, actions, inner thoughts, reactions and speech. Rama Mehta focuses more on the sociological side of the characters rather than the psychological. Her characters behave according to the rules of the society and status. She presents the lives of her characters with meticulous care and excellence.

Major Characters

1. Geeta : is the central character. The whole story revolves around Geeta. She is Ajay Singh's wife. She is an educated, lively and vivacious Bombay girl who is conscious of the traditions and customs of the haveli ; many of which she does not like. Initially there is an inner struggle, seen in her, against the traditions of the haveli, but gradually the love, care and concern she experiences, makes her appreciate and accept the life in the tradition – bound haveli. She adjusts herself to it and finally becomes its mistress.

2. Ajay Singh : is the only son of Bhagwat Singhji. He is educated and deputed as the Head of the Department of Physics in Udaipur University. He is a man of impressive personality who marries Geeta, a girl from a modern family of Bombay. Geeta is a companion to him and he too understands that the segregated way of life in the haveli is oppressive for her. He has great attachment with his parents and his birthplace. He is a strong man with a pure and simple heart.

3. Bhagwat Singhji : is the owner of the haveli 'Jeewan Niwas' and the son of Sangram Singhji who was a well-known minister in the court of Maharana of Udaipur. He is a man of dignity and faith. He is father of Ajay Singh and grandfather of Vijay and Vikram. He bears a deep understanding of progressive ideas around him and is the master and the decision making authority in the haveli.

4. Kanwarani sa : is Bhagwat Singhji's wife and Geeta's mother in law. She is the mistress of the haveli, who throughout her life preserves the glory, customs and traditions of the haveli. She is a strong woman of great understanding with a soft and motherly heart for every maid and their children. She loves Geeta and teaches her everything about the haveli.

Minor Characters :

1. Sangram Singhji : He was the father of Bhagwat Singhji and grandfather of Ajay Singh. He was a minister in the court of the Rana of Udaipur and was considered a jewel in the court. His wife is Bhabha sa.

2. Gopal Singhji : is the brother of Kanwaranisa , who is ill and the reason is the dispute of property among his three sons. His sister solves the problem.

3. Vijay Bai sa : is the daughter of Ajay Singh and Geeta. She is a loving and caring child and dear to everyone in the haveli. Lakshmi's daughter Sita and she are good companions and play together.

4. Nandu Bai Sa : is Geeta's aunt-in-law and Bhagwat Singhji's sister. She visits

the haveli often.

5. Kanta Bai sa : is Bhagwat Singhji's widowed niece. She always appears in the novel with Nandu Bai sa and Manji.

6. Manji Bai Sa : is a close relative of Bhagwat Singhji.

7. Pari : is the oldest and the most senior maid in the haveli. She is hard working, tactful and devoted. She has served the haveli for forty five years and has established a special place for herself in the family. Everyone respects her. Geeta always touches her feet. She is the personal attendant of Kanwarani-sa and is seen involved in every affair of the haveli.

8. Sarju is a midwife who appears at the time of the birth of Lakshmi's daughter. She comes to the Haveli on auspicious occasions.

9. Dhapu is a maid for small tasks. She is Geeta's chief maid, her friend and guide. She tells her the etiquettes expected from a daughter in law in the haveli. Dhapu is small built , pretty, quite intelligent and clever. Geeta feels at ease with her.

10. Khayli is a cook. He is comparatively rich and lends money at high interest to other servants of the haveli. He is proud, strong hearted and intelligent.

11. Lakshmi is a maid servant. As she is unfairly accused of adultery by her husband, she flees from the conservative atmosphere of the haveli. Unfortunately, she ends up in a dangerous situation and is marked as an ill reputed woman.

12. Gopi Bai, Champa, Bhatiyani ji and Ganga Other maid servants to help in household works of the haveli.

13. Arjun is a fortune teller known as Bhopaji. He is a greedy man who by predicting everything shows as if he has some supernatural powers.

14. Daulat Singhji is a highly dignified noble man in Udaipur. He is the owner of the biggest haveli in the city. He keeps the haveli in very good condition. Daulat Singhji wants to marry his son Veer Singh to Geeta's daughter Vijay. His wife visits the haveli on many occasions.