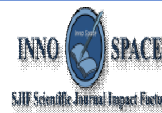


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Dr. S.A. Tambade

Department of English,  
S.B.S.K. Patil College,  
Kurundwad, Tal. Shirol,  
Kolhapur, Maharashtra

**A Study of Surrender and Relinquish in Rama Mehta's inside the Haveli**

**Abstract**

Gender and biological distinctions have affected women's consciousness in every walk of their lives. Patriarchal social systems kept women to the margins and inferior status. They were not given any opportunity to express their views or to show their talent. However, Rama Mehta has depicted various subjects in her novel Inside the Haveli viz. psychological, social, cultural, familial and spiritual. The paper attempts to study the theme of surrender and compromise in Inside the Haveli.

**Keywords:** Indian English literature, Surrender and Compromise in Inside the Haveli.

Inside the Haveli concerns with the issue of women's relation to tradition and modernity, it also deals with the heroine (Geeta) how she manages to carve out an identity for herself in the new environment. Anita Desai said about the novel, ' I remember the surprised delight with which I first came upon Rama Mehta's novel and encountered the freshness of her prose, the simplicity and tenderness of her evocation of an ancient and traditional way of life, and the understanding she brought to it.

Rama Mehata a well known sociologist was born in Nainital, India in 1923. She has made in depth study of educated Indian women who are caught between tradition and modernity. Rama Mehta was appointed in India's Foreign Service. However, upon her marriage, she was forced to resign her position. Inside the Haveli can be studied in the context of the autobiographical content. There is a significant resemblance in the life of the protagonist of the novel and the author's own. Rama Mehta married into an aristocratic family of the oswal community in the erstwhile Mewar state. The oswal community strictly maintained the purdah system.

The novel opens with the description of Udaipur's old city in its distinction from the new township. Udaipur was once the capital state of Mewar, now it is only a town like many other towns in Rajasthan. The white granite palace in which Rana's held court for four hundred years. Everything had changed in the state of Mewar and its capital. An award winning novel, Inside the Haveli depicts the struggle of a young girl, Geeta to maintain her identity in ancient and traditional ways of life in Rajasthan. The

novel begins with Geeta's entry into haveli. The protagonist, Geeta was born, brought up and educated at Bombay. She married in a conservative family and immediately finds herself trapped into repressive forces of traditions. Everybody calls her outsider who knows nothing about traditions and values of the haveli. Sangram Singhji's haveli like so many others of the nobility was in a gully whose courtyard was built three hundred years ago.

Geeta a girl from Bombay brought up in modern culture freely mingled with men and women. Geeta went to college and studied with boys. Her nature was frank, talkative and spontaneous that seems to be odd in the haveli. The Hindu purdah system in Jeevan Niwas has both theoretical and experimental background. It has a socio-cultural value. The purdah system would look like an insult of women's freedom and identity, but it also entailed sanctity, honour and decorum of women's identity. However, her parents worried of her marriage in old aristocratic family where women remain in purdah. How will she adjust there? Her mother gave her advice after marriage how to behave in haveli that is ...

'Keep your head covered, never argue with  
Your elders, respect mother-in-law  
And do as she tells you '

Every person is a part of the society. He or she is not an island. People must share water, air and other natural resources. Indian philosophy believes that we have to accommodate ourselves with others to live in harmony. It has been an age long problem to balance individualism with the welfare of the society. In India, there is generally no direct conflict with

social system as it is often in the west. Compromise is the word that aptly describes the Indian attitude towards life in general. General strategy of resolution is that of accommodation and reconciliation. To Europeans the theory of reconciliation is unacceptable. They believe in protest and rebellion. While in India negotiated compromise provides inner fulfillment and keeps away resentment and ill will. On the other hand surrender is regressive step that often entail continuation of injustice. The acceptance of main aspects of suppressive system would mean nothing but submission.

Rama Mehta in the novel describes the dilemma of a woman trapped in traditions that binds her and a desire to free her from these domineering forces. Geeta is a divided self. Her initial response to the life inside the haveli is that of disapproval and displeasure. Later it takes the form of protest and rebellion to some extent but not for long. Geeta's effort to relinquish herself to the life of the haveli makes her see the relevance of tradition and values attached to traditions.

Geeta is welcomed by Pari at the gate and asked her to keep purdah and has to make good reputation as a good devoted daughter-in-law. Women of the haveli remarked she does not even know how to touch the feet properly. Elder women shook their heads in disapproval but blessed... 'May you have eight sons?' Geeta even after two years of marriage her father-in-law was stranger to her. **Men in the haveli regarded as gods.** After marriage in a haveli everyone was to find fault with her.

When Pari becomes widow she was not allowed to put on colored saris bangles like other girls. In Udaipur widow put on grey or black colors. Pari narrated Geeta her widow life in haveli and restrictions imposed on her by grandmother-in-law. It was not considered proper for a widow to be gay and carefree. Dhapu suggested Geeta that she has to learn cooking.

*'Reading and writing will not keep the rats  
From nibbling at the sacks of wheat'*

As her husband is not satisfied with the present university Geeta is discussing about going to Delhi. Here we clearly notice that she does not like the traditional way of living in the haveli. She felt that her wishes have suppressed by the haveli norms. Now her education is of no use. She and her new identity here

is denied. Is she a woman tied in chains? She wants freedom from the traditional role of an Indian woman. In this regard remarks of the other women are quite significant....

*'She will never adjust; she is not one of us '*

When Dhapu said to Geeta what her mother-in-law expects from her that is she cannot lift her baby and kiss in front of others. Geeta thereupon reacted.....

*'Stop lecturing me, I am fed up with*

*All the pretence that goes on here, said Geeta*

*In a high-pitched voice, I hate all this meaningless fuss!*

*Don't tell me what I should do with my own child.'* (p. 32)

At nineteen Geeta came as a bride to Jeewan Niwas, she was lively and spontaneous, and her parents had encouraged her to speak her mind. After two years she saw in haveli that nobody really expressed their feelings. Everyone moved cautiously, every word was weighed before it was spoken. Geeta loves books and asked husband to buy books but no one liked her habit. Her mind always thinks about to maintain the modern values that she has always lived by. Once Ajay said to her...

*'I know it is difficult for you here*

*But Geeta, by being depressed,*

*You will not change things,*

*This life in purdah is not meant for you.'*

After three years of her marriage she asked Ajay with his academic qualifications he could not be satisfied working in Udaipur. Think of going to Delhi University. However, her attempts yielded nothing, she expressed her feelings, and you lead your lives and think women are mere chattels. In fact I don't even see any point in being here. I may as well go and stay with my parents, you won't miss me, and there are hundred people to take care of you (p. 54)

Now Geeta's dream of leaving Udaipur died in heart. Her husband was rooted in the traditions of Udaipur and finally realized that her life is 'haveli'. She has accepted the discipline of haveli. She is now young mistress of haveli. Her identity is changed. However, deep in her heart dwells her progressive view. She decided to admit her daughter Vijay in school. Besides, she admitted Sita (maid's daughter) in school. Geeta though living in haveli in purdah knows the value of education. As Manji said...

*She is glad to see Gita is bringing*

*New ideas into the haveli,*

*It is time, things changed...*

*It is no good living on in the past.' (p. 115)*

For the sake of children, we must look to the future...times have changed and even the thick walls of the haveli are crumbling. The old generation will die soon and purdah too.

Geeta now wanted to give her new identity to haveli members. She started classes in haveli for servant's children and for illiterate women and children from neighborhood. Her sewing classes in haveli helped women to earn some money for them. She continued to support her independence and progressive views. When Daulat Singhji's wife came in the haveli to ask the hand of Vijay for her son Vir Singh she was shocked. Geeta is against child marriages. When her mother-in-law asked her about her daughter's marriage. Geeta reacted as...

*'What a mistake I made to stay on here,  
I could have easily persuaded  
Ajay to leave...*

*Now trapped and can't escape.' (p. 205)*

She continued, 'I have put up with enough in your family, and I am not prepared to bend any more. I won't ever agree to this criminal act of deciding who Vijay will marry when she is still a child. I know exactly how these things work in this place. First they will only want an engagement and no sooner has that been done, they will start talking about marriage. You are all a bunch of hypocrites.' The manners of the haveli threatened to snuff out her independence and progressive views. Throughout the novel Geeta fought for her views and maintain the modern identity that she has lived by. She struggled much to carve out her own identity in the male dominated world. The elimination of Geeta's victimhood at the end makes her more adoptable to the design of the haveli as her efforts were showing colours of a new beginning which she has. Thus, the victory and fulfillment of Geeta too lies in the fact, that she liberates herself from the strangulating traditions and she embarks triumphantly on her flight towards emancipation in spite of being caged in the haveli.

Geeta uses her education and creativity in compromising with traditions. Her stance is creative and constructive that bridges modern thinking with preservation of traditions. Geeta understood the value of family honour.

Family honour is patriarchal strategy used to enslave women. However, in the meanwhile she realized the benefits and relevance of family traditions. She begins to think that traditions of the haveli are worth preserving. The portraits of the ancestors kept traditions alive for generations. She saw the mother-in-law and her manners denote the pride and dignity. Geeta now felt that there was nothing wrong in these traditions.

Geeta understood the purdah system is a blessing in disguise which smoothes women's identity. It preserves and protects women's identity. Women were safe in segregated apartments. They worked and lived inside maintaining the haveli affairs. There was rapport and harmony among all the people in the haveli. The servants often expressed their views. The protagonist realized that her father-in-law was concerned about her. He always supported her views and advised the maid servants to provide her comforts and space required. Her mother-in-law wanted to mould her for the haveli but she was always very kind and co-operative. She protected Geeta when someone tried to criticize her. Thus her wish to change the haveli becomes secondary to her concern of the guarding the honour and dignity of the haveli.

Geeta's compromise is also seen in Vijay Bai Sa's engagement. In the beginning she was quite enraged and said, 'If I have ruined my life, the children are not going to ruin theirs. She was adamant refuses to accept, Vijay Bai Sa's engagement proposal to Vir Singh. Her father-in-law appealed her to consider the marriage proposal that one day or the other girls have to marry and go to their father-in-laws houses. If the family of the boy is noteworthy, one must think over it. Geeta realizes that Vir Sing was quite handsome and educated. He was going to England for further studies. Besides, he came from a rich and reputed family of Udaipur. Finally Geeta accepts the proposal. Her decision was not a mechanical imitation of the tradition but her own admission of the fact that the decision was worth acceptance. She has changed her stance as she begins to see the advantages of the traditions.

Towards the end of the novel Geeta felt that the mantle of the guardian of the haveli would now fall upon her and it would be her duty not to let the honour of the haveli die in at any cost. Her mother-in-

law comforts her when Bhagw at singhji breathed his last. She said,

*'Don't cry my child. Your father-in-law lived honorably. He has gone, leaving you the mistress of this house. If you loved him, you will keep this haveli as a trust for your children. He did his duty by us all. Now it is your turn. Don't weep. If you don't show strength now, to whom shall I look for comfort? You are all I have. Everything else has gone'. (p. 264)*

Geeta accepts her new role with dignity assuring all that she would do her best to maintain the dignity of the haveli. She surrenders to the rules and regulations of the haveli. She is willing to adjust and she is successful in adjusting with the traditions of the haveli. She surrenders herself to the love of the in-laws and her husband. Geeta compromises to bring constructive and sophisticated changes in the haveli. Once again she is compelled to do the conventional role of a woman in Haveli as the novel ends with...

*Don't cry, Binniji, said Manji, pressing Geeta's head to her breast*

*You are now the mistress of the haveli.*

*You can't forget its traditions in your sorrow.*

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