

Quest for Redemption in Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*

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Abstract

Quest for something or someone is one of the inborn natures of the being human. His whole life wheel spins around the central axis of attaining his seeking surmount. It is a continual process. It acts both as a powerful driving force and highly activated catalyst in the progress of one's life. As human beings are created in the exact image and form of God, Almighty, they have always an inner urge to undress the mortal things and to clothe themselves with immortality. When man tries to come out from the shell of earthly things, the need of redemption arises within him. This presented paper focuses on how the characters of the novel **A River Sutra** are struggling hard to be redeemed from their afflictions.

KEYWORDS: Quest, redemption, natures, human

Gita Mehta an eminent Indian writer differs from the other Indian women writer on choosing the theme of her work. Her central themes are India and Indianess. Her works represent the socio-political history of India rather than a domestic Indian woman's life. Mehta can write equally to the writings of the male writers. All the characters of Gita Mehta's novel *A River Sutra* depict the significance and the necessity of receiving redemption in one's life. The Narmada pilgrims do keep all the rituals only with the hope of getting salvation. The six different stories voice the agony of the unredeemed human race. This abstract is taken from the article 'Redemption in Literature'.

Literature takes the same theme of brokenness and renewal and places it in the context of life on earth, thus including understandings of redemption that may stray from those theologically defined.... Shakespeare also takes the idea of redemption as a central theme in his Last Plays, especially in *The Winter's Tale*, where it is made clear that salvation comes through the undeserved grace and mercy of God, and not through human actions.

In the Monk's tale Gita Mehta peels the inner cry of a rich young man, Ashok. His father 'owns one of the largest diamond companies in the world'. (ARS15). As a heir of a diamond owner, he is suffocated with the surplus wealth. Despite the luscious luxury, the hectic delight of his energetic youth, the warm love of his companion he feels exhausted inside. He confesses 'at the age of twenty-six I had already become fatigued by the world' (ARS 29). Wine, Wealth and Women cannot bring peace to his life. Much troubled by the inner guilt, his heart overweighs with untold frustration. He leads an irresponsible life on the course the nature takes him. On the other side he is anxious whether the inhumane attitude of his father would affect his life. Like a sea wave his soul

is tossed between his inner and outer conflict. He is in need of a space to release his pressure.

At this juncture he encounters with an old Jain monk. His words seem to be healing oil for his wounded soul. He is enlightened by the principles of the Jain Leader Mahavira. Believing it would pave a way to get salvation from his seized soul. Eventually he becomes a Jain monk. The Jain monk realizes that his quest for redemption cannot be quenched by the quantity of wealth he has accumulated. He bemoans 'my life of unremitting pleasure ceased to satisfy me, leaving me exhausted from the last indulgence while anticipating the next' (ARS 29).

The story of Master Mohan contrasts with the life of the Jain monk. Mohan has poverty –stricken and unhappy married life. He leads a life of wilderness in spite of having a wife and two children. Master Mohan is a good natured, generous, genuine gentle man. Mohan's ambition is to become a great singer. Unfortunately he loses the privilege due to the break of his voice. Ceaselessly he is tormented and accused by the sword like words of his wife. The swelling of his heart grows larger and bigger. He tries to find solace in music. Amidst this he meets a young blind boy, Imrat. Blessed with a divine voice, Imrat draws the attention of Mohan in a split second through his singing. Due to unavoidable circumstances Imrat's elder sister leaves him under the care of Master Mohan. The attempt which he takes to lift up the life of Imrat also ends in failure. He cannot reap the joy of his hard work. The successive failure turns his life into sour. Once he loses his beloved Imrat, Mohan commits himself into suicide. Tariq Mia sums up 'perhaps he could not exist without loving someone as he had loved the blind child' (ARS 91).

The story of an executive, Nitin Bose throws light on the impact of modern and magical power in one's life. He is a young executive in one of Calcutta's oldest tea company. He is crumbled due to the exploiting, stoic atmosphere of the metropolis city Calcutta. The colleagues of Nitin indulge in several bad habits such as drinking, sexual activities, gambling, etc. Witnessing these horrible sins Nitin slightly struggles to move forward. His friends challenge him 'avoid the estate; yaar. you'll be an alcoholic in a year' (ARS 113). He thinks that his old life at Calcutta has begun to vanish. But the inner lustful thoughts never get diminished. It slowly starts to raise its head 'like some small night animal sexual restlessness began to gnaw at the edges of (his) my content' (ARS 122). This life of suppression gets him more distressed. Keeping all his lustful desire inside Nitin becomes enslaved by loneliness. The quest for getting redemption from his sinful life increases in him day by day. He tries his grandfather's book and drinks alcohol to get away from this painful addiction. But it ends in vain.

Meanwhile, Nitin is struck out by another blow, a magical power. Rima, a Vano village woman seduces him by using her black art. She visits him at night to satiate his sensual pleasure. Once the truth lying behind Rima, that she is a wife of coolie, is revealed Nitin feels shame and he determines to go back Calcutta. He confesses, 'How glad I was to return to Calcutta and the insouciance of my old life of clubs, friends, and betting... How light heartedly I flirted with the sophisticated, husky-voiced women ...' (ARS 130). It shows the power and the impact of modernized immoral acts which

overrules him. It becomes a part and parcel of him. He earnestly seeks for a salvation to get rid of the ugly stinking life. It clearly depicts his inability to save himself on his own work. He direly needs a redeemer.

The Courtesan's story manifests one of the most unique and inseparable feature of a human being, a sense of belongingness. Though it is an essential one, one should be able to identify the limitation of its boundaries. Courtesan's entire life depends upon the Courtiers, Kings and Princes. They dedicate their lives to the good sake of the royal blood. Even though they learn the sixty-four arts perfectly without the entry of the reputed men in their life it will of no use. The Courtesan who is kidnapped by Rahul Singh, protests him first. She ignores rebukes, rejects and hates him. In due course she yields herself to Rahul due to his words, 'Don't You know you are mine? You have been mine in many lifetimes ...' (ARS 184). Women are easily carried out by the sentimental words and affection of men. They strongly believe that they belong to men. They are called to be the better –half of men.

With a sense of belongingness, the Courtesan surrenders herself into the hands of a bandit. A girl, who had mastered the sixty-four arts, lived in a royal Zennana and a highly demanded one, losing herself to a stranger Rahul Singh at once is noticeable. After the death of Rahul Singh, she cannot live all alone. That much she has been attached to him. Like a victim of parasite she wanes and grows lean and weak without the main support. Finally she drowns herself in the river Narmada and sacrifices herself. She cannot come out from her blind patterned mind set-without Rahul Singh I cannot live. She says, 'My grief was too great to sustain the life within me' (ARS 187). Not only this Courtesan but still many women continue to struggle to overcome the upper hand of men, loneliness, a sense of belongingness, expecting to be cared all through their lives. It's because since from childhood women are taught to be under the control of men.

'A man looks at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at the heart' (ISam16:7). It is true in the life of a Musician's daughter. She is the only beloved daughter for her genius father. But she outwardly appears ugly. 'My ugliness upset her (mother). When other children stared at me, sniggering at my ugliness, my mother's eyes filled with tears... My father was oblivious to my ugliness' (ARS 210,211). Being a young girl she too has many dreams and desires about her future. Her father is 'the finest Veena player in the world' (ARS 199). He teaches the mystery of music to her believing that it will reduce her mental stress.

Being caught between her father's expectation and mother's disappointment she becomes depressed. Her feelings are deeply ignored yet she endures it with a pinch of hope. She cries, 'How can I describe my anguish in the years that followed, as I struggled to please my father inside the music room, and then outside the music room consoled my mother for my ugliness' (ARS 213). Her grief spells no bounds when she is betrayed by her betrothed, her father's student. Her life ends there. The merciless instruction of her father is the cruelest thing in her life. 'He says I must understand that I am the bride of music, not of a musician. But it is an impossible penance that he demands of one, to express the desire in my music when I am dead inside' (ARS 226). Of course she is dead

inside. Because her own image of herself is distorted by the outward experience. The music cannot redeem her from her untold suffering.

The remarks of J.L.Mehta in the Advanced study in the History of Medieval India: 'The devotional worship of God with the ultimate object of attaining 'moksha' or salvation is called Bhakthi' (Mehta183) can be seen in the life of Naga Baba, a naga ascetic. He overtakes a toughest journey to attain his salvation. He commits himself a rough- tough fatal meditation in order to learn the ways of redemption from his Guru.

After the days of fasting, he gets down to beg for food from the untouchable, unclean, outcaste people. Secluding himself from the inhabitants of human beings, he performs many rituals and meditates to be saved. This life of ascetic does not last longer to him. He moves on to the next realm of his journey, i.e. reentering the world. In the name of Shankar, he again returns to his normal life believing in the philosophy that 'the soul must travel through eighty-four thousand births in order to become a man' (ARS281). Without having an affirmation to be saved, he keeps on doing various religious rituals. It shows that his quest for redemption still exists inside his soul.

They all pursue redemption but in different ways of their own. Redemption is the process of regaining, reconciling, reclaiming, re-establishing, and recovering and so on. It is quoted in the website Cross Ref- It, 'Redemption is a biblical word that means "a purchase" or "a ransom." The word redemption literally means 'buyingback'. Historically, redemption was used in reference to the purchase of a slave's freedom. A slave was "redeemed" when the price was paid for his freedom'. Redemption is the experience of an exchanging life not a changing life. Changing of the outward life does not bring redemption in one's life. Earnestly seeking the way of Our Creator instead of creations only leads ones to the way of redemption. Thus Gita Mehta's six stories portray the plight of the un-redeeming souls and their attempts to attain the bliss of redemption in their lives.

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