

Feminine Power and Strategies of Resistance in Gita Mehta's Selected Novels

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ABSTRACT: Women in Indian English fiction have increasingly become an important site/area for feminist and postcolonial literary debate. The book analyses Gita Mehta's "Ladies Coupe", in which women move from the margins into the centre of identity, power, and survival interwoven with patriarchal and socio-political structures. This article explores feminine agency and resistance in Mehta's selected novels: *Raj*, *A River Sutra*, and *Snakes & Ladders*. This study examines the emergent forms through which women of royal, spiritual, and elite backgrounds are able to negotiate patriarchal authority in challenging contexts by enduring attempted coercion as punishment for political dissidence. Using postcolonial feminist perspectives, this paper explores how feminine identity is constructed and the dynamics of resistance working here by employing Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as a discourse. Most critical work on Mehta's fiction has analyzed it only through the lenses of cultural representation, ecofeminism, and political history; there have been few comparative studies of the intertwined depiction of feminine resistance in these three novels. Using text and comparison analysis, the paper argues that to Mehta, resistance is not just overt rebellion; instead, it is slowly negotiating, surviving, and asserting oneself against constricting social structures. Through its findings, this thesis finds that feminine power in Mehta's fiction is revealed as about resilience, transformation, and re-formation of identity within patriarchal spaces. Within the field of feminist literary criticism and postcolonial studies, this paper seeks to respond to these previous debates by illustrating how time and space reveal female multiplicity in Gita Mehta's narratives.

KEYWORDS: Feminine agency, resistance, patriarchy, postcolonial feminism, gender performativity, Gita Mehta

I. INTRODUCTION

This genre of writing in English has developed, over the years, into an important literary stream that interrogates and speaks up about issues like gender injustice, patriarchal subjugation, identity crises, and the battle for selfhood endured by women in a socially restrictive milieu. Postcolonial women writers have increasingly subverted traditional images of femininity by depicting women negotiating power, survival, and identity in patriarchal societies. In this literary framework, Gita Mehta will be an important figure as the core of her fiction is about postcolonial women's realities at the intersection of history and politics, spirituality, aristocratic culture, and gender relations.

The works of Gita Mehta depict women not just as passive victims of patriarchal oppression, but as active agents negotiating power and identity. That is, her female characters illustrate the domestic emotional conflicts and cultural confines through which they are subjected (the established politics of gender) but also create divergent routes through their resilience, silence, adaptability, and psychological endurance. As Pathak and Singh (2022) state, Mehta's feminine consciousness is expressed in the incessant struggle of women against patriarchal domination and social expectations. Correspondingly, Mehta depicts in her novel women breaking away from the age-old concept and stepping towards being self-conscious, as Jayasudha (2017) asserts.

These three novels, *Raj*, *A River Sutra*, and *Snakes and Ladders*, examine feminine agency within varying socio-cultural parameters royal aristocracy, spiritual landscapes, and elite political society. Mehta's underlying themes in *Raj* are the lives of royal women in colonial and patriarchal systems, which have their identities prescribed by duty, tradition, and politics. The novel depicts the identity crisis that women negotiate between colonial modernity and

princely culture (Satishkumar, 2023). Similarly, Govinthasamy, Sivakumar, and Arul Anand (2022) cite Mehta as interrelating Gender with colonial history through its representation of women.

In *A River Sutra*, feminine resistance is portrayed through spirituality, emotional suffering, and ecological symbolism. Women in the novel experience psychological trauma, emotional isolation, and social marginalization, yet they attempt to protect individuality through resilience and spiritual endurance. Poongodi (2021) observes that Mehta establishes a symbolic relationship between women and nature to emphasize ecological and feminine oppression within patriarchal systems. Similarly, Chetna (2023) interprets the novel through an ecofeminist perspective and argues that women and rivers function as interconnected symbols of continuity, suffering, and survival.

Where *Snakes and Ladders* takes its examination of elite political society and post-colonial modernity, it points to another dimension of feminine experience. Women attempting to navigate tenuous social and political structures in spaces where status and performance, and the expectations of local culture, inform feminine identity are depicted by the novel. According to Satishkumar and Suresh Kumar (2023), Mehta's portrayal of contemporary India entails females negotiating patriarchy in elite socio-political spaces. According to Vijaylakshmi & Shukla (2023), the women of Mehta's fiction are constantly in pursuit, trying to strike a dynamic balance between traditional impulses and modern aspirations, longing to sustain their autonomy and dignity.

Analyzing feminine agency and resistance in the selected novels, this study investigates through postcolonial feminism and ecofeminism. We examine how patriarchal authority is negotiated by women through emotional endurance, performative adaptation, symbolic resistance, and ecological association. Most available criticism on Gita Mehta has focused on her ecofeminism, political history, and cultural representation, but a comparative analysis of feminine resistance across the three novels selected has received little attention. Hence, this research attempts to bridge the hole in that concern by doing a comparative multidimensional representation of feminine identity, survival, and resistance in Mehta's fiction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gita Mehta, the acclaimed novelist, is being paid attention to in academia for examining themes of patriarchy, feminine identity, spirituality, ecofeminism, and one's political history or postcolonial society. Women, on the other hand, critics have been harping on representation with regard to cultural templates and emotional resilience, socio-political metamorphosis. Yet most works focus on individual novels in isolation, and intertextual comparisons of ways feminine agency and resistance are enacted across Mehta's major texts remain few.

Some studies have examined *Raj* from feminist and post-colonial perspectives. According to Pathak and Singh (2022), feminine consciousness is conveyed by resisting the oppression of women and traditions that limit their place in society. Mehta's female characters negotiate identity in a space defined by aristocratic and colonial structures that dictate women as bearers of family honour and custodians of cultural values, the study notes. In this manner, Jayasudha (2017) argues that the Hindi woman in *Raj* moves slowly from a passive figure to one who knows herself and can claim emotional as well as intellectual freedom. Later, Satishkumar (2023) notes the new novel as a portrayal of an identity crisis experienced by Indian women who are caught between age-old traditions and personal identity.

Raj has also attracted criticism for its politics. Taking the analysis of her novel as an example, Govinthasamy, Sivakumar, and Arul Anand (2022) write about the politicization of history: Mehta links women's experience to colonial power and princely politics in a war between past versus present, elite versus marginalized. Through case studies of how men solidify the exclusion and domination of women permeating institutions, political and cultural, the novel, as scholars argue, painfully illustrates patriarchal systems that keep women in their place. Equally, Lakshmi analyses the feminine task of change in *Raj* highlights the emergence of emotional resilience and feminine agency through psychological endurance and strategic adaptation.

The study of *A River Sutra* is dominated by ecofeminism, spirituality, and emotional suffering. The novel represents women's agonising plight in patriarchal cultural systems that delimit feminine identity, as reflected in Swarnalatha's (2019) contention. Mehta offers resistance in a manner not borne of an active rebellion but instead through mental fortitude and spiritual reflection, according to the study. In a similar fashion, exploring the novel through a cultural

ecological lens, Poongodi (2021) illustrates the symbolic relationship between women and Nature. The study describes Mehta as depicting spaces in nature to heal emotional wounds and the domestic feminine lineage.

Eco feminist reading of A River Sutra also reveals the physical-territorial and ecological location of Underdeveloped women being further subjected to oppression. As mentioned by Chetna (2023), the river stands for female resilience, continuity, and survival against patriarchal structures in the text. Similarly to formalistic metaphor, Nanda (2022) claims that ecological images help Mehta in critiquing patriarchal hegemony and cultural oppression. Tangellamudi(2015) also explores the ecofeminist overtones in "The Courtesan's Story" and notes that this nature becomes a figurative extension of women's emotional entanglements and social tragedy.

As for Snakes and Ladders, most scholarly work has concentrated on political modernity, elite society, and the question of cultural change. According to Satishkumar and Suresh Kumar (2023), the novel captures the changing socio-political context of postcolonial India as it dramatizes women's struggles with elite patriarchal social systems. The sense of identity negotiation through performance, adaptation, and social intelligence is what the study reveals about the roles played by women in the novel. In the same vein, Vijaylakshmi and Shukla (2023) draw parallels between Snakes and Ladders with other Indian narratives, stating that the female characters in Mehta's plot are largely vacillating between tradition and modernity, attempting to uphold dignity while striving for self-governance.

Bhadury and Mishra (2021) study Gita Mehta's writing historically and socio-politically to showcase how it is a metonymy of the cultural dissonance in postcolonial India. The research elucidates the symbiotic relationship of gender, politics, and cultural transformation that permeates Mehta's narratives. Mehta offers a critical view of Indian traditions in transition, particularly with respect to the changes that Indian women have seen within their husbands and sociopolitical system (Chourasiya& Khan 2025).

While these studies offer valuable perspectives on Gita Mehta's fiction, most existing scholarship tends to focus narrowly on ecofeminism, political history, spirituality, or cultural representation individually. Surprisingly, not enough work has been done on the comparative study of feminine agency and resistance in the Raja River Sutra and Snakes and Ladders. This study, therefore, attempts to fill this gap by comparing Gita Mehta's portrayal of women in active negotiation of identity, survival, and power in the patriarchal and postcolonial structures.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applies postcolonial feminism and ecofeminism as the two main theories that play an important role in studying feminine agency and resistance in Gita Mehta's selected novels. These theoretical lenses present a powerful means to examine the prominent themes of women negotiating identity, emotional survival, and patriarchal oppression in royal, spiritual, and socio-political arenas. Gita Mehta's fiction is rooted in culturally patriarchal and politically power-ridden structures where women's multifaceted resistance requires the practice of feminist theories to analyze it effectively.

Postcolonial feminism analyzes the links between the oppression of women by men and colonial history, cultural traditions in former colonies, and patriarchal control over those societies. Unlike Western feminism, postcolonial feminism emphasizes that women in postcolonial nations experience oppression through both colonial influence and indigenous patriarchal systems. Women in Gita Mehta's fiction are often subjected to disempowerment within the circuits of aristocratic, cultural, and political institutions that determine feminine identity and social mobility. The featured fictions depict women steadily negotiating authority, trying to retain individuality and emotional independence against patriarchal structures.

Raj provides an archetypal case where patriarchal oppression is compounded by princely custom, colonial politics, and aristocratic expectations that molded women into demographic social roles in a belittling presence of personal identity. Women are told through the line of violence to remain obedient, make sacrifices, and pledge their loyalty with no avenue of expressing individual desires. However, Mehta presents these women as emotionally robust characters who exercise power by sacrificing their immediate happiness for psychological survival and fortunate adaptation. They notice that in the novel, feminine consciousness grows as women resist patriarchal limitations and social norms (Pathak & Singh, 2022). In the same vein, Colonial politics honestly enhanced women's marginalization by confining feminine identity to political honor and cultural hegemony Govinthasamy, Sivakumar, and Arul Anand (2022).

Ecofeminism makes up another significant critical background for the research, especially concerning the analysis of A River Sutra. This is called ecofeminist theory, which describes the processes by which women and nature experience oppression together in patriarchal systems. Patriarchal culture usually dominates women and the environment through control, exploitation, and marginalization this is where the theory originates. In A River Sutra, Mehta uses word imagery that links women multiple times to rivers, landscapes, and ecological imagery as metaphors for emotional suffering, continuity (of life), and resilience. The novel creates a cultural ecological relationship between women and nature, which is established through spiritual symbols alongside environmental elements in Poongodi (2021).

Along similar lines, Chetna (2023) highlights the river in the novel as symbolising feminine continuity and survival amid a patriarchal society. The anguish that women go through is metaphorically mirrored in the ecological geography of the river Narmada. According to Nanda (2022), Mehta's ecofeminist representation critiques patriarchal domination by showing women and nature as both battered and brought under control, which positions us to consider the positions of both. Also, Tangellamudi(2015) points out how, in the novel, nature acts as an extension of a woman's emotional experiences and psychological fragility.

Feminine resistance in the chosen novels is thus less a self-assertive rebellion than an endurance of emotion associated with silence, adaptation, and survival, but this idea of feminine resistance can become more tyrannical. Mehta depicts women managing patriarchal oppression through psychological negotiation rather than outright rebellion. Snakes and Ladders' ingrained feminine identity becomes very much entrenched in the narratives of political modernity and social elite performance. Women channel patriarchal authority via social savvy, flexibility, and a combination of feminine tropes. As Satishkumar and Suresh Kumar (2023) discussed, the novel shows how women have been surviving by combining tradition and modernity through negotiation to keep them intact within elite socio-political environments.

Thus, the theoretical frame allows for a holistic reading of how Gita Mehta depicts women as active negotiators through identity, culture, and power. The intersection of political domination and gender power is explained by postcolonial feminism, while ecofeminism points to the symbolic relationship between women and ecological spaces. All these theories together show feminine resistance in Mehta's fiction to be multilayered and intricately linked with emotional survival, continuity of culture, and dealing with patriarchy.

IV. FEMININE AGENCY AND RESISTANCE IN RAJ

It describes in-depth facets of women's lives under male-dominated norms of princely India during this time, where patriarchal values as well as state expectations dictate feminine identity and social conduct. Gita Mehta investigates the ways royal women obtain authority and individuality within aristocratic structures ruled by patriarchal power through shared experiences. The novel depicts women not so simply as victims of patriarchy but as psychologically strong and successful in resisting the oppression through emotional endurance, symbolic resistance, and positive coping strategies.

"You coddle the children too much. Tikka's feet weren't allowed to touch the ground until he was old enough to ride a pony. Now you're doing the same with the girl Raj by Gita Mehta. (p. 9)

The women of Raj are made to live dignified, largely domestic lives of loyalty and family honor, where cultural traditions die hard and aristocratic duties won't abide the gaiety of patriarchy. Royal duty and social obligation frequently eclipse their personal wants and emotional needs. But through her representation of these women, Mehta shows how those systems merely provide the backdrop for feminine consciousness that can still flourish regardless. According to Pathak and Singh(2022), feminine consciousness in the novel has evolved with regard to the realization of oppression and the birth of identity in a patriarchal scenario amongst women. So resistance in Raj is not always about open rebellion but more about debate, slippery negotiation, and emotional survival.

The intersectional experiences of the protagonist show tensions between feminine individuality and royal obligation. At the same time, women within the novel are forced into traditional feminine ways of obedience, sacrifice, and silence, yet psychologically battle for emotional freedom and identity. Mehta's works represent the change of women from mere images to conscious beings who strive to create a place for themselves within aristocratic structures (Jayasudha, 2017). It is a change that mirrors the rise of female empowerment through self-realization and mental fortitude.

Patriarchal repression, in turn, is aggravated in a colonial context something that the novel also addresses. The last independent remnants of the Raj are the princely states, each governed under Britain's colonial thumb, where political power and cultural capital operate together through the lens of gender. Women are often seen as symbolic embodiments of royal honour and national honour. Mehta further politicizes history by approaching women's experiences in terms of their relationship with colonial power structures and patriarchal interpellations, as per Govinthasamy, Sivakumar & Arul Anand (2022). The authors explain that royal women become trapped in systems that favour political stability and cultural loyalty rather than the liberty of femininity.

But Jaya stared silently at the strange, almost mystic paintings in which a horse was composed from trees and mountains and kings, and the Maharani did not know what went on behind her daughter's wide green eyes. Raj by Gita Mehta (p.8)

Secondly, Owen's novel illustrates how women navigate patriarchal power with emotional fortitude and, of course, false agreement. In contrast, female characters display compliance to social expectations on the surface but rebel internally against oppression by silence, patience, and psychological survival. Women in Raj are seen as negotiating identity between societal expectations and individual agency (Satishkumar, 2023). So that internal conflict showcases how feminine resistance often comes through emotional resilience rather than an outward fight.

Transformation of Feminine Selfhood as Another Aspect of Feminine Agency in the Novel. In Mehta's world, women living within constricting realities slowly become conscious of themselves. They are forced to rethink survival and identity due to emotional suffering, political instability, and social pressure. Lakshmi's reading of feminine metamorphosis in Raj delineates women's psychological resilience as resistance against the confines imposed by patriarchy. The very act of survival becomes a statement against the disappearance, absence, and overall fragility of being feminine.

"Rulers are men and men are always frightened. A man cannot govern unless he confronts his own fear." Raj by Gita Mehta (p.13)

Through this, the novel seems to suggest that there is an underlying emotional isolation faced by these aristocratic women based on how royal femininity is constructed by patriarchy. Royal privilege is arguably not freedom; it simply ups the factor for social compliance and sacrifice. Women are expected to preserve cultural dignity while suppressing personal desires and emotional expression. Thus, Mehta points out the paradox of aristocratic society where feminine identity is constructed through confinement, silence, and emotional restraint.

"It was as though she had lost the capacity to fear and was watching the proceedings from some distant vantage point where she was not threatened. She even wondered if the sal tree was trying to comfort the panther as it dropped red blossoms like silk handkerchiefs on the captured animal's back". Raj by Gita Mehta (p.18)

By depicting the royal women and colonial politics, Raj illustrates feminine resistance as a more complex process, based on patriarchy, history, and emotional survival. Mehta shows how women assert power not only by rebelling, but also by enduring, adapting, and being psychologically savvy. In the end, the book reveals feminine selfhood as a battle for identity and religious autonomy within patriarchal structures.

V. SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL RESISTANCE IN A RIVER SUTRA

A River Sutra is an intense study of feminine misery, spirituality, ecology as symbolism, and emotional survival in a patriarchal society. Whereas Raj is interested in royal politics and aristocratic structures, A River Sutra explores women's lives as a spillage of intertwined stories riddled with emotional trauma, spiritual searching, and cultural marginalization. Gita Mehta depicts women as people fighting against social institutions that silence feminine voicing, autonomy, and even dignity. Thus, the novel broadens our understanding of resistance against patriarchy by articulating women's emotional lives with a spiritual and eco-conscious dimension.

In the novel, women's lives through patriarchal feminine identity are based on sacrificial silence or resilience that leads to emotional isolation and social rejection or psychological suffering. Mehta, however, does not show women here as simply damsels in distress; she depicts them as survivors who fight against the odds and carry on. According to Swarnalatha(2019), feminine resistance in the novel takes place through women experiencing emotional suffering but still surviving and preserving a psychological strength as a persistent condition of ability under social oppression. Therefore, the female protagonists do not fight patriarchal domination directly but endure by analyzing and internalizing their spirituality.

"The river is among our holiest pilgrimage sites, worshipped as the daughter of the god Shiva." Mehta, Gita. A River Sutra. (p.5)

In the novel, spirituality does play an essential role as part of the feminine identity. The river Narmada thus envisages the narratives and represents continuity, catharsis, and longevity. The stories of women are often centred around spiritual journeys that symbolize their struggles to heal from trauma and rediscover autonomy. According to Chetna (2023), the symbolic connection of women with the river is connected to feminine continuity and perseverance within a patriarchal culture. Because, just as the water flows away, no matter how it suffers and how it is stopped, women's lives are thrashed in innumerable ways but their femininity endures.

A River Sutra has various representations of women and the aspect of ecofeminism. All throughout her writing, Mehta constantly links women with nature, rivers, forests, and ecological imagery in order to illustrate how the oppression of both women and the environment is interlinked. Having discussed this theoretical framework, Poongodi (2021) concludes that the novel establishes a cultural ecological relationship in which women and nature have been exploited and controlled by patriarchy. Caught in this web of symbolic ecological character, he casts a critical eye on patriarchy and those who would seek to conquer not only the feminine but also nature.

The stream took on the form of a woman the most dangerous of her kind: a beautiful virgin innocently tempting even ascetics to pursue her, inflaming their lust by appearing at one moment as a lightly dancing girl, at another as a romantic dreamer, at yet another as a seductress loose-limbed with the lassitude of desire. Mehta, Gita. A River Sutra. (p.10)

Similarly, Nanda (2022) interprets the novel from an ecofeminist perspective and states that nature functions as a space of emotional healing and resistance for women. The ecological environment surrounding the river provides female characters with temporary refuge from patriarchal oppression and emotional trauma. Tangellamudi (2015) further explains that nature in the novel symbolizes women's emotional vulnerability and inner suffering. Ecological imagery therefore, becomes an extension of feminine consciousness and psychological experience.

"You shall be forever holy, forever inexhaustible." Then he gave her in marriage to the ocean, Lord of Rivers, most lustrous of all her suitors. Mehta, Gita. A River Sutra. (p.9)

Silence is another important form of feminine resistance within the novel. Women are often stripped of opportunities for overt self-expression, at which point silence becomes a method of emotional survival and an act of symbolic resistance. Instead of subverting patriarchal authority, female characters largely retain their dignity through inwardness, emotional self-control, and withdrawal from spirit. While this silence is both oppression and resilience, as it permits an inner identity to exist in a social experience that does not nurture diversity.

The book illustrates the impact of emotional tragedy on femininity. Abandonment, betrayal, desire, and pain (just to name a few) naturally force women to fortify their mental faculties. In her analysis, Mehta shows that the very act of emotional endurance can also become a type of feminine power. Women did not survive because of existing patriarchal systems, but by developing emotional resources to navigate pain and social exclusion.

I am now a vanaprasthi, someone who has retired to the forest to reflect. Of course, I was forced to modify tradition, having spent my childhood

in Bombay and my career as a civil servant working only in cities. Mehta, Gita. A River Sutra. (p.4)

Moreover, *A River Sutra* critiques male-constructed images of femininity by revealing the emotional burdens women are made to bear. How Women Are Expected to Sacrifice Their Individual Hopes & Wishes in Favor of Cultural Expectation and Approachability, but Mehta draws women who continue to fight for their right of autonomy and dignity in the face of all these constraints. By examining the spiritual aspect, through their bonding with nature or ecology, and displaying psychological resilience, women reclaim patriarchal identity forms that society imposes on them.

So *A River Sutra* positions feminine defiance as an emotional, spiritual, and ecological praxis. By depicting women who endure their oppression, orient themselves with their inner selves, and use nature as a catalyst in dealing with the conflicting forces of life, Mehta imbues them with resilience. The novel finally proves that feminine agency can prevail through emotional survival and spiritual continuity, even in the most oppressive patriarchal systems.

VI. SUBVERSIVE POWER AND ELITE FEMININITY IN SNAKES AND LADDERS

Snakes and Ladders explores postcolonial Indian society along multiple axes of politics, aristocracy, cultural change, and gender. Gita Mehta presents women moving in high-life circles, nearly uniquely, where political power, social privilege, and patriarchal expectations mediate the female character. Whereas *Raj*, with its royal patriarchy, or *A River Sutra*, with its focus on emotion and spirituality for endurance, present feminine resistance to political culture through patriarchal negotiations but still rooted in some kind of performative adaptation of emotional-spiritual negotiation (again) ability discount coupon 28 mg "battlefield skill," *Snakes and Ladders* presents something else: molded from the shards by negotiating social norms acceptable in modernity.

The title itself is symbolic of the very transient nature of power, success, and social mobility in postcolonial India. The women of the novel are in privileged aristocratic positions, but still restricted by patriarchal structures that govern feminine behaviour and being. A model of female behavior was expected elite women were to uphold social respectability, protect a family's "honour," and conform as women into certain prescribed forms of femininity. But, Mehta reveals that aristocratic privilege does not necessarily guarantee emotional freedom or personal autonomy. Instead, women are negotiating authority within male-dominated political and social systems.

*Living through our first halfcentury
of nationhood has been a roller-coaster ride, the highs so
sudden we have become light-headed with exhilaration, the lows
too deep to even contemplate solution, as if the game of Snakes and
Ladders had been invented to illustrate our attempts to move an
ancient land toward modern enlightenment without jettisoning from
our past that which is valuable or unique. Mehta, Gita. Snakes and Ladders (p.10)*

This is arguably abstractly reflective of the socio-political takeover in postcolonial India, where tradition and modernity exist together uneasily through a cross between itself. According to Satishkumar and Suresh Kumar (2023), Mehta shows modern India as going through rapid political and cultural transformations, but patriarchal ideologies predominantly cast shadows over the gender relations. Given the duality of women, they have to maintain feminine roles while also adapting in light of new modes of individuality and social engagement. These experiences illustrate the complexities of postcolonial modernity, in which social advancement does not fully liberate women from patriarchal governance.

Performative femininity is another central theme in the book. In order for women to gain influence or even just survive within elite society, they often resort to socially acceptable behavior and aristocratic sophistication. The external agreement often hides an internal war and tactical acumen. They train Muslims and South Asian Women to play behavioral tricks that Protect Gracefulness within systems where they can only make do, Period. Vijaylakshmi and Shukla (2023) further state that the female characters in the novel negotiate identity through juxtaposing socio-psychological pressure with personal desires. Femininity, therefore, can be seen as a kind of performance needed to thrive in hyper-feminized elite political spaces.

It also criticises the superficiality and instability of the political culture in postcolonial India. Often, social relations and political coalitions are built on performance, appearance, or clever maneuvering rather than any real feelings of affection. In this unpredictable climate, women need to acquire fortitude and flexibility. Some of them are born leaders; their survival instinct runs not just deep but all the way through to an emotional intelligence that reads, reacts, and responds. As such, Mehta represents women's agency as a negotiation dictated by political instability and patriarchal power.

On the other hand, women in the book find means of power that are indirect but no longer direct rebellion against those in authority. Emotional control, silence in public, performative reflections of class standards at all times of the day, and malleability to change accordingly are rescue strategies when navigating one world versus another. Recognizing the limited opportunity for female figures within their world, they negotiate power via monitored behavior and tactical self-presentation. Such a mode of resistance mirrors patriarchal space, in which direct confrontation may cause women to risk social security and recognition.

*find myself able to see only fragments of a country in
which worlds and times are colliding with a velocity that defies
comprehension. These essays are an attempt to explain something of
modern India to myself. I hope others may also see in them facets of
an extraordinary world spinning through an extraordinary time. Mehta, Gita. Snakes and
Ladders (p.15)*

In fact, the depiction of elite femininity is an emotional burden of aristocracy inherent to the novel. Women are conditioned to be dignified in public but to suppress their selfish desires, emotions, and uniqueness. The patriarchal perspective expects women to serve as emblems of cultural prestige and stability, critiqued by Mehta. Yet these pressures are countered by an agile psychological preparedness and social agency for female characters that persists.

Bhadury and Mishra (2021) state that the postcolonial story told by Gita Mehta in her fiction is one of cultural contradictions manifested through the indeterminacy of modernity and tradition. Likewise, as cited in (Khan & Chourasiya, 2025), Mehta critically represents Indian traditions in transition but highlights how patriarchal structures influence and shape the lives of women culturally and politically. Such viewpoints drive home the argument that feminine resistance in *Snakes and Ladders* is deeply interlinked with social acclimatization and emotional resilience.

This results in a view of feminine agency as an ongoing negotiation within elite political and cultural contexts. For Mehta, women become intelligent recoverers of patriarchal modernity, using performative femininity and emotional labor to survive while also adapting their methods for long-term survival. It is here that the novel reminds us more generally of how feminine resistance in a postcolonial society so often registers as discreet negotiation rather than outright revolt.

VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In the selected novels, *Raj*, *A River Sutra*, and *Snakes and Ladders*, Gita Mehta presents feminine resistance as a complex process determined by oppressive patriarchy, emotional survival instinct, ecological awareness, and socio-political changes. While the two novels differ in terms of setting, narrative style, and thematic focus, they share common ground in their portrayal of women negotiating identity and power in restrictive patriarchal systems. Gita Mehta repeatedly shows women as not merely passive victims, but living on the edge of survival, attempting to hold onto a semblance of dignity, independence, and selfhood through that most humble of all rebellions: silence.

The three novels have shown a similar dominance of patriarchy on feminine identity formation and conduct. In *Raj*, patriarchy exercised power through princely norms, colonial politics, and aristocratic ideals that controlled women's emotional and social lives. In *A River Sutra*, patriarchal oppression rises as emotional marginalization, spiritual suffering, and cultural silencing. In a similar vein, *Snakes and Ladders* depicts an elite political society that requires women to retain sociocultural correctness and performativity in male spaces. Yet, how these novels take place in various settings tells us that women are answerable to patriarchy for their identities at all times.

Another key similarity includes the representation of female resistance as both a psychological process (like how one endures emotional pain) instead of a direct fight against patriarchy. Mehta's female characters do not openly defy the social system but resist it silently, introspectively, accommodatingly, and through symbolic means. According to Pathak and Singh (2022), Mehta's feminine consciousness develops through women's realisation of their oppression and asserting themselves slowly but consciously in repressive conditions. This stance subverts infantile feminist arguments, which draw cartoons of feminine freedom by only assimilating rebellion in its loudest forms. Instead, Mehta depicts resistance as a quiet and almost never-ending distance between survival.

Another major difference between the two novels is in their way of feminine agency. Feminine resistance in *Raj*, furthermore, is tied to royal identity and colonial politics. Women negotiate power with emotional suppression, noble restraint, and psychological stamina. Girls who are the protagonists in many of these novels face a tension between private self and public duty while trying to hold on to an individuality threatened by patriarchal princely culture. The politicization of history in fact, arguing that feminine identity is equated with political honor and colonial power only aggravates the marginalization of women across cultures, Govinthasamy, Sivakumar, and Arul Anand (2022) state.

A River Sutra leans towards emotional suffering, spirituality, and ecofeminism. Women's method through interplay and association with emotional factors and stable symbols of the domestic world related to nature. As Poongodi (2021) points out, Mehta provides a cultural ecological link between women and the environment, showing how their oppression is interconnected as part of a patriarchal society. In a similar manner, the river in her novel is seen as representing feminine continuity, survival, and emotional endurance (Chetna 2023). Hence, this is where resistance in *A River Sutra* becomes spiritual, analytical, psychological, and ecological.

In contrast, *Snakes and Ladders* represents feminine resistance in the elite political and aristocratic framework constructed by postcolonial modernity. Women in power negotiate through performative feminine, social intelligence, and tactical behaviour. As Satishkumar & Suresh Kumar (2023) denote, women in the novel exist by striking a compromise between tradition and modernity within precarious socio-political contexts. This resistance is regularly not direct due to the fact that elite patriarchal structures require conformity and are tough on emotional expression. Vijaylakshmi and Shukla (2023) elaborate that women in the novel are consistently torn as they negotiate between what their culture expects them to be and who they truly are.

A further comparative aspect underpinning the three novels is that of shifting concepts of feminine identity itself. In *Raj*, identity evolves through emotional endurance and royal responsibility. In *A River Sutra*, identity is shaped through spiritual searching, emotional trauma, and ecological symbolism. In other words, identity takes the shape of spiritual searching, emotional trauma, and ecological symbolism in *A River Sutra*. Feminine identity in *Snakes and Ladders* achieves its links to modern political fortunes, aristocratic culture, and performative acculturation. However, all of their respective female characters try to regain selfhood within systems determined to control and restrict the autonomy of femininity.

The novels also highlight silence as an important feminine form of resistance. In *Raj*, all silence denotes a certain kind of aristocratic discipline and control over emotions. Silence in *A River Sutra: Psychological Trauma and Spiritual Meditation*. In *Snakes and Ladders*, silence turns into an instrument of strategic survival in an elite political society. In these different representations, Mehta shows that he does not see resistance as a universal constant but as contextual and multi-layered.

The novels chosen showcase the struggle between tradition and modernity in post-colonial India. Females such as the ones Mehta depicts are the most trapped between the inheritances of culture and doorways to owning self-identity. According to Bhadury and Mishra (2021), for Mehta, the fiction written by him depicts postcolonial India that is dualistic in nature it has been modernized, but patriarchal structures co-exist. Chourasiya and Khan (2025) also note that Mehta draws a critical commemoration of the reconceptualization of traditions within postcolonial India from the perspective of women suffering in shifting political and social orders.

Therefore, a comparative analysis reveals that feminine agency in Gita Mehta's fiction is transcended through endurance, primal rootings, emotional sobriety, historical cognizance, and ecological filament negotiating ambivalence and strategic sedition. Despite the different forms of resistance presented by each novel, all display a struggle to

maintain dignity and individuality in idiosyncratic patriarchal settings. So, ultimately, Mehta presents women as negotiators of survival and selfhood, which enriches feminist literary criticism and postcolonial discourse.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The four novels of Gita Mehta, *Raj*, *A River Sutra*, and *Snakes and Ladders* are representative of such voices that collectively redefine feminine agency, resistance, and identity in patriarchal postcolonial crush. Moving through royal, religious, and upper-class socio-political spheres in Mehta's writing, women emerge as not victims per se, but at minimum negotiators of power and survival against the often ruthless determination of cultural expectation and imposed gender norms. The study argues that feminine resistance in Mehta's fiction does not essentially flow from either defiance or revolt; it emerges rather through emotional endurance symbolically, performative femininity, and psychological resilience. Using postcolonial feminism and Judith Butler's Gender performativity, the paper shows how in these novels feminine identity gets constituted as a social construction, a strategized negotiation, and a politically and political/cultural determined phenomenon. Shashi Deshpande's protagonist resonates with Mehta's female characters in breaking the patriarchal mould by purely surviving subtle acts which signify a rule-breaking as well as a powerful new feminine identity. The comparative observation places emphasis on the fact that although the modes of resistance are different in all three novels, their female characters strive for independence and dignity in societies that suppress and control them. Indeed, Gita Mehta's fiction does enrich feminist literary criticism as well as postcolonial discourse by representing women as proactive negotiators of identity and power rather than passive victims of oppression.

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