

The Silent Transformation Inside the Haveli

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Abstract: *Traditions are not mere chains of slavery passed on by the past; they also have "strength and security" though it means "isolation and stagnation" It is for this reason Mehta deserves commendation that she did not allow her protagonist to succumb to stagnation or helplessness. On the other hand she could reconcile herself to the idea that the "anachronism" had a meaning too. "How could she allow little discomfort o blind her to the great tradition of the family" (Pp. 34-3S).*

Keywords: *Traditions*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditions are not mere chains of slavery passed on by the past; they also have "strength and security" though it means "isolation and stagnation" It is for this reason Mehta deserves commendation that she did not allow her protagonist to succumb to stagnation or helplessness. On the other hand she could reconcile herself to the idea that the "anachronism" had a meaning too. "How could she allow little discomfort o blind her to the great tradition of the family" (Pp. 34-3S).

In this process of silent revolution without blowing trumpets or Without offending any she induces her mother-in-law with a feeling of warmth towards modernity. She deviated from "dissatisfaction to acceptance, from tolerance to generosity, and finally to magnanimity" (p.259). That family is not a battle ground for skirmishes and the desired results can be achieved through patience and perseverance has been ably demonstrated. And in this process of 'give and take' the heroine also gets transformed. What appeared to be a prison acquired the status of home, sweet home, to the extent that she said, "I don't want to leave Udaipur now" (p.137).

Sarla emphasises the fact that tradition was not a ruthless demonstration of male chauvinism alone. The various restrictions imposed by the system were not solely for the women - men also had their own mores of conduct. Turbans and Churidars in the street was an established norm of etiquette. Be it Udaipur, Hyderabad or Bhopal; the "sanctity" of purdah was as much respected by male : as by females. When women had to move out of houses drumbeaters used to proclaim and the males used to turn their backs towards the street. "It was system not a mere arrogance of chauvinism."

The "doll kept in a glass for a marionette show" (p. 89), the un "willing prisoner" from a "constricted, suffocating atmosphere of the haveli" was able to open a few windows to allow some breeze of freedom is a matter of triumph u women's awakening. She does not shout from the house top cliché like "women lib" but yet manages significant contribution in her own humble way.

The two important approvals that she could thus obtain were: right of the girl for education irrespective of their class distinction and right of the mother to have a say in deciding marriage of her daughter. What responsibility the grandparents used to discharge was slowly but surely granted to parents. She does not call it a "victory" In all her humility, issues like the marriage of Vijay, her own daughter or education of Sita even after her marriage are convincingly tackled by her. An Amazon like attitude would have thrown the peace of the haveli to shambles; but a subservient role brought her "Bhagwant Singhji's esteem and affection." Similarly, child marriage was also delayed considerably - a marvel in Rajasthan even today.

Class distinction did matter in issues related to girls. Birth of a daughter was no "cause of rejoice" as Gangaram. the servant, sighs. But when a daughter is born to the owners of the haveli. it assumes a different significance. It becomes an occasion for celebration. As Pariji declares "So what if it is a girl? After all it is the first

time in sixty years that there are four generations under the roof of the haveli" (p.7) This has a relevance today when girl child is terminated in the foetus itself; inspite of so called modernity. In fact modernity provides the weapons to determine sex of the child and then to terminate it. The twenty first century is in no way brighter than the dark medieval ages when people used to bury their daughters in sand lest they should be humiliated by others.

When Geeta came to Haveli, she was merely tolerated. Her delinquency (of having studied in college) was forgiven with the hope.

"even an educated girl can be moulded. That I was not wrong in selecting you ..." (p. 26). Thus began the dis-orientation process to refashion an educated girl "into a model daughter-in-law" The final result was fortunately, contrary to expectations and the educated girl did succeed in ensuring approval of her plans. Not only this, she could create an awareness among the elderly ladies that gone were their days and they should put no obstructions against the forces of change. What the son fervently hoped.

My mother's generation will die and with it the traditional way of life (p.112) was foreseen by Kanwarani Sa and she insisted her daughter-in-law not to "think of us all the time" (140). It is because of such recognition that she encouraged Geeta to go ahead with her plans of educating girls and maid-servants "Binniji, don't let yourself be disturbed by Nandu bai Sa" (p.140).

The 'mod' have their sessions of Meddona and Beauty contests and on special occasions they stage a march with placards not to shout "women lib" but to exhibit their expensive Saris and precious jewellery. Here is the vision-Don't just leave your children to the care of ayahs and Khansamas. Discharge your duty as mother and give the maid servants also an opportunity to learn and grow. This will require abstaining from Kitty parties and boozing sessions. Would Namita Gokhale or Shobha De stoop to conquer this way?"

ZN. Patil examined the whole work as a sociological case study examining the various symptoms of ailment in the society. He enlists a number of taboos that governed the haveli and made its inhabitants to conform to these norms. He begins by pointing out the North-South difference in attitude towards daughter-in-law. While brides in south have no such restrictions, in north they cannot talk with members of family directly. Daughters or maid servants are required to communicate the wishes of the two groups. The "authority taboo" enjoins on the married couple not to demonstrate concern or affection. Even parents should not make a show of their filial love by kissing a child or caressing them. This affects consequent kinship in which verbal as well as non-verbal behaviour are restricted. This also affects even textile behaviour" even among women, daughter-in-laws are expected to keep their heads covered. Barnabas records that women belonging to 65-80 age group admitted that they had not seen the faces of their daughters-in-law though they had been in the family for two to three decades. Geeta was always in a perplexed state wondering how on earth she would be distinguishing one guest from the other. At the time of touching the feet the feet were the focus of attention, faces irrelevant. It is this anonymity "befitting" a house wife that Kanwarani Sa was not given a name throughout the novel she was Bhagwat Singhji's wife. Women are not expected to peep into male quarters or to stare at the paintings of the ancestors (that too without an escort)! Patil enlists the 'purdah taboo', and "reticence taboo" in which women do not speak until they are asked to. Similarly, the "child bed and menstrual taboo" serves a much needed relief. The women, at least for a few days, avail themselves of rest from the hard work they are enjoined to perform. The "death taboo" prohibits close relatives to mourn the death by weeping loudly - decorum should be maintained. So also is the "burial or cremation taboo" compelling purification before entering the house.

And yet, the customs have a brighter side too. A daughter-in-law s expected to show courtesy to the maid servants of the family also. Much do we lambast about old generation, or the feudal system. But the norms they had set are not despicable. Today, when parents are disobeyed, to respect the servants is something unusual. Not only this, even "greatly disliked relatives are received with utmost courtesy and show of joy".

The language is plain and simple without any intention to perform gymnastics in linguistics. The novel divided into three sections, each covering five years traces the evolution of silent transformation. Recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award (1979); the novel, is the swan Song that the distinguished lady gifted us.

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