

# NARRATING WOMEN'S AUTHORITY IN GITA MEHTA'S RAJ, A RIVER SUTRA, AND SNAKES AND LADDERS

<sup>1</sup>Dr A Murugesan, <sup>2</sup>Chithra V M

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Chikkanna Government Arts College, Tiruppur, Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India

<sup>2</sup>Ph. D Part Time Research Scholar, Department of English, Chikkanna Government Arts College, Tiruppur, Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India

## Abstract

We have here one of the major contributions, a study that explores, through historical fiction and interconnected narrative fiction, plus cultural essays, how the female characters in Gita Mehta's works get to wield agency within the complex web of different structures such as patriarchy, colonialism, nationalism, class, religion, and social change. Per it, female power in Mehta's works should not be confined solely to political formalism or direct forms of resistance, but also through political leadership, narrative voice, symbolization, endurance, economic independence, cultural memory, and public participation. From a female royal princess in a confinement state to the ruler of a principality, Jaya Singh in the novel *Raj* demonstrates the potentials and limitations of women's political power in the princely states of India. In *A River Sutra*, the image of the river Narmada, a woman's aspect, and experiences related to women's work, care giving, silence, loss, and survival, all combine to show that authority can go beyond the limits of institutional power. As one of the three types of texts that Mehta's book has, it is a collection of her literary essays, poems, etc. *Snakes and Ladders* is an example where she is using her narrative voice of an essayist to highlight issues like women's labour, self-employment, and social participation, which bring forward women's agency through economic and discursive forms. The article references feminist-postcolonial criticism and feminist narratology and examines how narration, voice, silence, and social status are key in the portrayal of women's power. The conclusion draws that Mehta depicts women's political power as an act of negotiation and not total subjugation. It happens through skillful change, resistance, ethical awareness, and changing culture and a politically repressive environment from the inside.

## Keywords

**How to cite this article:** 1Dr A Murugesan 2Chithra V M. NARRATING WOMEN'S AUTHORITY IN GITA MEHTA'S RAJ, A RIVER SUTRA, AND SNAKES AND LADDERS. *Int J Drug Deliv Technol.* 2026;16(83s):1632-1640. DOI: 10.25258/ijddt.16.83s.178.

## Introduction

Gita Mehta's writing is deeply involved with Indian history and culture, cultural plurality, colonialism, nationalism, and social change. Her writing shows an understanding of power while asking questions about who holds power, who has been denied power, and how the marginalized negotiate structures of power. This paper analyses the authority of women in *Raj*, *A River Sutra*, and *Snakes and Ladders*, three works representing historical fiction, interconnected narrative fiction, and cultural essays respectively. In *Raj*, Jaya Singh's changes, from imprisoned royal to politician, underscore the difficult situation of female within the princely state system in India. In *A River Sutra*, story link to the respect of Narmada carry the women's experiences from a scared memory distress, work and survival - focused in perspectives into the image. *Snakes and Ladders*, in one sentence, can be depicted as the portrayal of India post the independence when Mehta looks at how the section within various society were socially separated, a social transition, how difficulties women employee and finally women's independence. Here, the female power is portrayed as that of authority reading

interpretation, making guidance resistance, working and performing in public life. Obviously, women hardly ever possess unrestricted power owing to different patriarchal-colonial economic and cultural factors which they encounter. One significant term is narration as the paper, besides discussing the idea of authority, also delves into the literary devices using which females' voices silences life-stories are presented. The essay draws on feminist-postcolonial criticism and feminist narrative to analyze such problems as gender and authority voice and silence on one hand and class social history on the different. It considers, for one, the government act executed by Jaya, the symbolic feminine power embodied in Narmada, and also the collaborative effort female has done as agents in modern India. The author's central dispute is that Mehta conceives of women's authority as a kind of negotiated agency which is impacted politically using strategy narrative work, endurance and social participation.

## 2. Conceptual Framework: Postcolonial Feminism, Narrative Voice, and Agency

This study will be based on the postcolonial feminist method to the subject matter. One such structure is

postcolonial feminism that is concerned with the interconnected of gender at one stage with expansionism nationalism class, devotional family, and social hierarchy at other. One can see the relevance of this approach clearly where Jaya's women at Mehta's place are situated differently in royal households, temples, labour systems, and public space. In Raj, Jaya Singh's authority is shaped by princely inheritance, marriage, colonial intervention, and dynastic succession. In A River Sutra, women's lives are touched by spirituality, poverty, desire, memory, and vulnerability to society. Women's work and public participation in Snakes and Ladders reveal the relations between gender, economic inequality, and national development. The research also brings to the foreground the feminist dimension of narrativity, which is about the connection between narrative form and one's gendered power. Feminist narratology is interested in voice, silence, perspective, storytelling, and the manner in which women's experiences may be shaped, mediated, etc. through narrative. This method is worth looking at in revealing Jaya's party loyalty, the male narrator's level in A River Sutra, Mehta's essayistic voice in Snakes, and Ladders. Based on this, female have authority as much as they openly resist, but they also negotiate. By the help of the idea of limited autonomy, one sees that the female might be in influence as well if they exercise provision of care as a faithful observance, hard work, planned silence, public participation, moral endurance using the sample of showing these. Jaya gets her political force from undertaking royal responsibilities during in A River Sutra and Snakes, and Ladders the women gain their power from waiting alive working conduct as a group. The text framework regards women's strength in various forms of guidance storytelling religious symbolism, economic self-reliance, and involvement in public matters.

### **3. Raj: Royal Patriarchy and Political Authority**

Gita Mehta's Book Raj tells us how female, Even with the fixed rank of the princes where royal an advantage exists beside with gender limitation, and colonial dependence are not the only forces at play - there are another strength ways of the world women's role. Jaya Singh's story, for instance, explains that women in royal families have their role in the continuation of the dynasty, in the remembering and passing down of cultural heritage, and in the performance and exercise of rites and rituals, etc. Even so, a woman is often left powerless to determine her own destiny and future by the restrictions imposed by society and the family. Jaya's transition from the sequestered environment of Balmer to the world of politics in Sirpur exemplifies how a woman's power is a consequence of patriarchal

structures and not in opposition to them. This means that a woman is not simply the victim of patriarchy, but an agent involved in the patriarchal relations. So, this novel describes princely womanhood simultaneously as a luxurious and dangerous life: Jaya enjoys the benefits of royal rank, which shield her from the outside world; Still, the decisions on her life, marriage, personal and political rights, etc. are left at the whims and fancies of the males.

### **3.1 Purdah, Education, and Dynastic Obligation**

Jaya Singh's growing years in Balmer are deeply influenced by royal customs. It is a closed world where every minute of Jaya's life is taken up with the rigid routines of a royal household. Jaya's early lessons are more than books and school - they include the learning of royal etiquette, the different levels of royal ranks, the concept of honor and family name, and the various duties of a princess. The entire royal estate inculcates into Jaya that a person cannot lead an independent life in the shadow of royalty's reputation and the bloodline of the dynasty. So, her personality is basically a result of the powerful feeling of a legacy handed down to her.

*"Each village must choose someone to represent its interests who can attend the Secretariat and learn this new method of government... The governing council of Balmer will be chosen by vote, and you will share equal power with the nobles" (Mehta, Raj pg no: 152 ).*

The zenana is one of many elements using which gender was making with a special emphasis assigned to it. Women constricted to it who are stopped from coming into contact, not even in visibly, with female durbar, company, and military scenes literally become period. Still, totally passive and women lacking political agency they are not. Jaya, through the ladies' chamber, can witness political talk, royal ceremony, family dispute scenes, and the growing design of Indian ruler-British relations. So, this room of women is also analyses as a spot where they keep their social history, comprehend the events of their time, and relay the data to the coming generation.

The education of Jaya using her training is multidimensional - beside, the cultivation of courage, self - discipline, and gym sessions are also part of her training scheme. Through her involvement in horse riding, hunting, and other royal events at the royal court, Jaya not only delight the public but also, in so doing, difficulties the current idea that a queen is nothing over a decorative figurehead. She is not just the leader's daughter or wife but a real person with

the wholeness of a character and voice. When Jaya shot a boar in a tracking session, it was a kind of symbolic planning for her public career to come. Although bravery alone might not have been adequate to get her the initial advantage, it is sign that she already owns the feature which would describe the male-oriented, of course - mainly. So, by these means, Mehta seems to indicate that although Really it may almost be a nothing that Jaya can change, As a small children, Jaya had been imparted every bit of legislative know how by her royal parents.

### 3.2 Marriage, Widowhood, and Succession

Jaya's marriage reveals the political function of women within dynastic systems. Her union with Prince Pratap is not based on emotional choice or personal compatibility; it is arranged to secure an alliance between Balmer and Sirpur. The demand for dowry, which goes back to the days of arranged marriages, further exposes how marriage nowadays has turned into a major business and political contract. Jaya's body, wealth, and future are the tools the males will use to protect their interests, further royal bonds, and manage the disturbances generated by the colonial powers. Her refusal to be taken away for marriage, which means giving up her home, life, and family altogether, is most obvious.

*"Jaya was married by proxy—to Prince Pratap's sword" (Mehta, Raj pg no: 169).*

This ritual of marriage has profound meaning because it makes Jaya an object in dynastic transactions. The situation of her marriage has been so arranged that she has to marry almost a stranger and start living in a new kingdom where her prestige is the function of the king who takes her. Prince Pratap later describes their marriage relation as "strictly a marriage of convenience" which proves that Jaya's feelings and knowledge play a negligible role in the marital arrangement at first. Her marriage reflects the way royal women are put on the responsibility of carrying offspring and lineage through marriage while at the same time being denied equal control over the institutions that they have been entrusted to uphold.

Maharani's widowhood prolongs Mehta's criticism of patriarchal domination of women's bodies and identities. After the death of Maharajah Jai Singh, the Maharani, who loses her jewels, the right to wear colours, her hair, dignity, and respect, is shown that her act of attempted self-immolation is actually a declaration revealing how psychologically violent the culture is through which a woman's value is determined by marriage and male protection.

Mehta depicts Maharani's condition not as a mere hardship but rather as an actuality of widowhood where one loses one's power very drastically. In this situation, the Maharani, who was the queen of

Balmer and the one that people paid respect to, is made a public spectacle by being laughed down for the simple reason that she doesn't have a husband or a son to stand for her and speak for her. This case brings to light how a woman who is dependent on a male succession for her identity can be very easily devalued and discarded in a royal patriarchal family. Meanwhile, the Sati Mata's act prevents the royal woman's suicide, which demonstrates women's mutual aid and women's resistance to the sanctioned gender violence.

### 3.3 Jaya Singh and Negotiated Sovereignty

Jaya's transformation from princess to Regent Maharani represents the pivotal moment in her political identity, and her authority grows piece by piece through personal grief, political instability, marital unhappiness, and the decline of princely power; unlike a standard feminist heroine who gets her freedom solely by breaking away from tradition, Jaya fights for a place of power inside royal institutions. Her power relies heavily on her responsibilities towards Prince Arjun, and of course her will to safeguard his political future. She isn't merely after her own self-realization but rather the preservation of a kingdom and the succession of a dynasty in times of a historic upheaval.

*"How would she hold a kingdom for her son?" (Mehta, Raj pg no: 344).*

Being Regent Maharani of Jaya means she now has a formal political role, but the title does not give her any freedom from patriarchal and colonizing constraints. She will need to deal not only with Maharajah Pratap, who is her husband, but also the British authorities, plus having to answer for the nationalistic condemnation of princely rulers. "The British officials suspected her of being cunning but also of being too weak, and they accused her of hiding her true ambitions." This language used by a dominant culture shows how afraid they were of a woman whose behavior on the surface may be acceptable, but beneath she is clearly able to think independently as well as be politically sensitive.

*"A woman of great charm and seeming compliance" (Mehta, Raj pg no: 427).*

At most, one can say that Jaya's power was discussed independence. While her governmental getting heavier, she carry on to confronted in important request from the colonial empire, paternalism, patriot improve that validate patriarchal leadership only, the modifying series method, and so on. Jaya's laws

never an instance where strength is completely in female's palm; it is preferably a female who is capable to create governmental strength out of obligation she accepted from remaining. Mehta, across Jaya, present the concepts of royal maternity as single that is not only political smart but also able of lasting and applying power, although at periods restrained.

#### **4. A River Sutra: Sacred Feminine Power and Mediated Voice**

The novel of Mehta's river sutra is further womanhood clarification of a women's body that has been degraded. Women's empowerment, power, and strength in this novel appear across various signs such as religious emblems, nonlinear narrative, childbirth care, peace, and existence. In Raj, Jaya Singh's governmental development is the well-defined within the global of royal India. In A River Sutra Yet feminism administrative permission is shown through a number of narratives relevant by the river of Narmada. It's different a book that has a female as the main character who obtains assist political influence, this book represents female's freedom by determines the divine personality of the river, the spiritual endurance of female, their talent to concern for their beloved peoples, and their battle to maintain their self-respect within the status of stratified society. The many stories also enquire the voices of female since many females' expertise turns into also heard to or describe to storyteller.

##### **4.1 Narmada, Myth, and Feminine Symbolism**

The Narmada River is the main feminine entity present in A River Sutra. Besides being the background of the person's journey, the river is also a sort of providence that the story has drawn inspiration from in its different forms - various novels, spiritual culture, communal memory. Being once a member of a bureaucracy, the narrator of this story points out the Narmada as one of the holiest Hindu pilgrimage centers in India, and also describes this river as being born from the god Shiva. Through this connection, Mehta portrays the river as a feminine figure having qualities such as divine, giving life yearning flowing, and reviving. But, the Narmada's never-stop flowing also symbolizes perseverance, and That means, she represents both the past and the present while the individual agony is tied up with collective cultural recollection.

As the myth of the Narmada, femininity is a dynamic aspect rather than a passive one. The river is linked to beauty seduction danger, and spiritual power. Also, the river is portrayed as being able to tempt even sanyasins away from their vows. The Narmada is looked upon as a divine river yet the idea of her image gets influenced by a patriarchal way of seeing where one tries to describe the female as male sexual

and spiritual anxieties. This contradiction is important since it makes the river not merely a powerful female icon. Mehta instead shows how women can be glorified symbolically yet be governed or interpreted through male-centric cultural systems.

*"The river is among our holiest pilgrimage sites, worshipped as the daughter of the god Shiva" (Mehta, A River Sutra page no: 3).*

##### **4.2 Voice, Silence, and Framed Narration**

The narrative structure of A River Sutra matters a lot in the depiction of women's power. The novel is presented through the voice of a retired bureaucrat who turns rest house manager for a small town on the Narmada. In the beginning, this man attempts to escape the burdens of public life by retreating, searching for spiritual solitude and meditation. Yet, over time, through his interactions and conversations with locals, he learns to look at the world in a different light.

*"The woman shrank into the darkness clutching the child in her arms" (Mehta, A River Sutra pg no: 37).*

He shift into a silent observer, a scribe, mediator of the novel that a life to leap end to him. Al through his character reserve a stay consistent, at the same time, the tale strands floating the question of the sincerity of female voice. Women's stories in the novel are regularly formed by masculine narration, public opinion, spiritual obligation, or collective memory. Their tone may look by discussion, memory, songs, admissions, and tale described by another. This framework create women lecture both display and restricted. Female are not gone from the story, but their expertise usually arrive audience through stage of interpretation. Mehta thus draws highlight to the problem of portraying female interiority within a public where male usually own more power as storyteller, cultural authorities, administrators, and translators.

Yet there's a flip side - sometimes silence is a refuge in itself and protects one from a loss of face that can happen in male-dominated societies. So the way that Mehta presents her story, with a frame narrative technique, is able to show the complex interaction between the woman's voiced words and her silent ones. Women rarely hold the narrative thread and shape it through the medium they are presented in - but with the male narrator's attempts at keeping emotionally cold and objective constantly undermined - through an outburst of her suffering, the female voice comes up again and again as it wants to, after a period, be heard.

#### 4.3 Labour, Care, and Survival

In *River Sutra* shows the women authority and their work is shown and also it shows the care of the Women. The Vano women seems as employers who were segregating the fuel wood, confidently move through the forest, and have useful wisdom of the terrain among the river. Their existence problems the plan which lady among in domestic private areas.

These ladies are joined together to the natural environment, segregated jobs, and community heritage. Their employers might not provide the constitutional standing, however they give them a notice able public function and a form of the live power and the control among their environmental community.

The unidentified small stitcher gives there locating ideas of women's survival below the terms of insecurity and indigence.

*"I brought Imrat with me to Calcutta to sell my embroidery"* (Mehta, *A River Sutra* 36).

She went to Calcutta to sell needlework, although devastation of her village robs her of her father, husband, and family support. Discovering an income source and at the same time protecting and caring for Imrat, her sightless brother, is set to be difficult for her. Her scenario emphasizes the imbalanced weight women should lead if they are handling with economic difficulty, are suffering, are helpful for others, and are in dangerous conditions because of the community near them.

Although the central character defenselessness is proof, she is more than just described as a unprotected sufferer. She catches firm actions, seeking support, maintain the faith that her brother pursues, and striving to create a future for her by functioning.

#### 5. Snakes and Ladders: Economic, Social, and Discursive Authority

Gita Mehta's *Snakes and Ladders* utilizes story and essay writing to repeat on following-independence India as a country with contradictory. Through life story, social commentary, political critique, mockery, and personal opinion, Mehta represent a country in alter and instability between the conventional and the recent. The representation of female leadership in her manuscript is not just about personal achievement; it is through work, analysis, cooperative effort, learning, and the struggle of financial independence.

##### 5.1 Mehta as Woman Essayist

Mehta's postcolonial feminist voice has power in her capacity to investigate Indian civilization individually prejudiced third eye. Her opinion is individual perspective on expanded universe. She describes as

writer who has acquired to 'see and listen to oneself about the recalls, administrative experience and historical background.' She doesn't idealize either the time of her predecessors or by herself.

*"I 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"* (Mehta, *Snakes and Ladders*, "Foreword" pg no: 2).

Through memoirs of her personal experiences and conventions of political and personal reflection, memories of the personal are used to respond to history and politics. Her writing bears this very peculiar authority that she is not a disembodied voice narrating an unknown world, but she shapes India's lives with stories, encounters, memories, contradictions and facts: To this, the title *Snakes and Ladders* takes on a meaningful metaphor for India's path forward after independence. Mehta sets the path to development as analogous to the game of yore, where ladders provide the rapid leaps and snakes set the stunted falls.

*"[L]adders we had no right to expect" and "snakes of past nightmares"* (Mehta, *Snakes and Ladders*, "Foreword" pg no: 2).

While independence gave political independence and the promise of democracy, it did not contribute to the eradication of poverty, inequality, corruption, illiteracy, and gender bias for all groups. The game metaphor goes on to show how the reach of government programs is unbalanced, with some gaining access while others are thrown back time and time again. Mehta's essayistic voice employs both irony and satire in her critique of the simplistic stories of modernisation. She exposes the false promises of political slogans of development which are based on the changing material realities of poor people's lives. Equally, she challenges the presupposition of elites that economic growth, new technologies or urban consumption are indicators of social development. Her discursive authority emerges from this middle ground: skeptical of both projects, she reveals the gap between official narrative and disenfranchised realities- women, workers and migrants, and communities at the periphery of economic might.

##### 5.2 Women's Labour and Collective Self-Reliance

The donation of women's employee is the key element in Mehta's study of indigence and improvement. Underprivileged females are represented by her junior to receiver but preference as

worker active is deduced from unstable and minimum-wage job. The female portray here contains waste management worker, structure and skilled workers, street vendor and contractor who, below hard conditions, fee collected to provide for their households. Their autobiography proves that condition like water shortage, redeliver, the financial strain, joblessness and encouraging consideration women to take up unsteady forms of job when Justification vulnerable to managing.

Mehta particularly attracts notice to the plans in which financing and transferred liability Limit needy woman. Families Impacted by water shortage and land degradation may be forced to relocate to towns, where their job remains low-paid and socially overlooked. The manipulation of forced labour explains how impoverishment could turn into a Sequence, traveling by families and increased across high-cost loans. In this regard, women's battle for earnings is also a fight for independence from dependence, debt, and loss of face.

The independent Women's organization, or SEWA, provides an Secondary pattern of Combined economic power. Mehta depicts how old female in ahmadabad shared their restricted earnings and entrenched a financial cooperative. To the short-term loans, deposit account, professional development, lockstitch machine, cottage industry, and entrepreneurship, female obtained bigger managing over their Worker and earnings. SEWA's significance lie in its denial of donation was the answer to destitution; rather, it makes organization through which female can assist one another and create economic security.

*"They called themselves SEWA, the Self Employed Women's Association" (Mehta, Snakes and Ladders, "Banish Charity" pg no: 35)*

But economic autonomy should, of course, not be mistaken for women acquiring liberation from all forms of patriarchal or class-based oppression at a single point in time. Mehta indicates that women are still subjected to different pressures, which include domestic violence, unpredictable work, illiteracy, religion, and social constraints that are all gender-based. Then again, through cooperative banking and collective organizing, the moneylenders and employers who exploit the women's weakness stand to lose much of their influence. So, women's leadership is gradually built upon common resources, tangible skills, and the ability to make financial decisions for themselves and their families.

*"Their own bank stood between them and such exploitation" (Mehta, Snakes and Ladders, "Banish Charity" pg no: 36)*

### 5.3 Gender, Modernity, and Public Agency

In the second chapter, Mehta conceptualizes modernity as a social process that is diverse and unequal. For example, education, a job, mobility, and engagement in voluntary associations may be instruments for enhancing women's position in society, but they can't as such subsume that of the patriarchy. Reading women's access to new opportunities and modes of work and participation into the public arena for persisting domestic labours, child care and family survival, Mehta advances a critique of the notion that modernisation itself is a cause of gender equality.

*"Their desire for freedom propelled them out of the confines of their sheltered lives" (Mehta, Snakes and Ladders, "Freedoms Song" pg no :7)*

The essays also attack very superficial aspects of modernity like consumerism, technologically superior devices as status symbols, and urban wealth. Mehta is making a point that even if a society has new market industries, media, or affluent middle-class lifestyles, it cannot simply call itself a modern society. Per Mehta, true modernity is the one that guarantees dignity to the worker, educates both girls and boys, brings economic stability, and gives access to common resources. She believes the development of women mainly depends not only on female ambition at the individual level but also on structural transformations about jobs, money laws, health care, and education.

### 6. Comparative Discussion: From Zenana to River to Public Sphere

Mehta showcases the authority of women through various scenes and spaces in Raj, A River Sutra, and Snakes and Ladders. The view of a zenana and a princely court in Raj explain how the power of women develop. In spite of the true that Jaya is held within the Restrict of wedding, she into a widow, I bound to princely Routine, and is expect to depend to patriarchal ethics, she gradually unlocked her Governmental vision and capture on a part of government as a mother and a ruler.

Woman authorization to the water deity, an entity of Shiva, is a path of give girlish power to the Narmada in River Sutra. But female speeches are constantly refined or male-authored. Through their job, caring survival, and showing moral responsibility, women

like the Vano workers and the young girl doing needlework show the kind of authority.

In his writing *Snakes and Ladders*, Mehta characterizes women's authority as economic and collective. A union of poor women, their role, and their opposition to debt, money lending and exploitation are illustrated through cooperation communal saving, taking out microloans, self-training, and self-employment. As we can see in their storylines, they become stronger mainly by the unification of individuals and financial empowerment.

*"The poorest women in Ahmadabad" ...  
"pooled the meager sums they earned ... and  
started their own co-operative bank"*  
(Mehta, *Snakes and Ladders* pg no: 35)

The three different genres and history settings the three stories describe the power of women in different ways. *Raj* talks about women as regents exercising political power. *Snakes and Ladders* is about women who get empowered collectively for economy. *A River Sutra* is about a symbolic power of women and also about physical empowerment. Mehta thereby challenges the stereotype of the only Indian girl image. She further explains that the autonomy and the capabilities of the Indian woman rely on their perseverance, hard work, acquiring knowledge, and providing care as well as on fighting against the surrounding forces.

#### **7. Narrating Transformation: Identity, Memory, and Change**

Gita Mehta shows the ways women change by remembering, enduring pain, going to school, working, and becoming self-aware. Women in *Raj* and *Snake and Ladder* don't get their power just by going against traditions. Rather, they take cultural values and modify them so their identities match the way their lives and the lives around them are changing.

*"These essays are an attempt to explain  
something of modern India to myself"*  
(Mehta, *Snakes and Ladders*, "Foreword"  
pg no:2).

In the play, *Raj* presents how Jaya goes from being a royal daughter to a political figure. Initially, her self-understanding is determined through zenana marriage, the family's reputation, and Rajput customs. But with marriage, motherhood, widowhood, and regency, she slowly comes to grips and develops a sense of political duty. Her development is not entirely in breaking away from tradition, but she creatively adapts traditional values of bravery, service, and guard into responses for

political needs to better serve the people of her kingdom.

*"Such knowledge would give a wife great  
power over her husband if she used it  
intelligently"* (Mehta, *Raj* pg no: 232).

Female in *A River Sutra* was revealed mainly in the article says among the tale: adjust, relocate, alter, and calm. Even significant of their proficiency were stated man retina, Lady yet proves who they are by attentively, useful, nice, and eternal structure essential of importance to the lady musical artist, who create use of theme to communicate her craving, Harm, and finally her self-fulfillment. Like that the lady artisan funds difficulty and the feeling she justifies to show how suffering can implant two operational boldness and independence.

Mehta explain in *Snakes and Ladders* how ladies perform multiple women works as the employer, women conductor, birth of the child and a find out that grows high in the world change. With the help of SEWA, ladies changed financially capable in a small income path by making respect practicing of wisdom, assistance, and in the self-worked employers. When poverty and overwhelming, restricting to be common, which are still there, the lone institution of women supporting women with deep respect, confidence, and independence in their personal work on which the female were never have thoughts earlier.

Mehta's story happens through the changes and the new convention. Jaya transfer from rewarding her royal obligations into taking on civic duties the female lead who alter recollection, song, and pain through them in *A River Sutra*. It develops into a living individual with independently and the female characters in *Snakes and Ladders* who change their common functioning into their financial independence.

#### **8. Endurance, Dignity, and Collective Female Agency**

Gita Mehta's toughness is not just drawing, alternative strength which one get and train, honestly and essential, by method of persistence. Women in storytelling want to regret, the common restriction, requirement condition beside the political instability nearby to which women are unprotected. They hold on assisting and helping the public with self-worth and instant capable to create major decision.

Jaya endures various struggles of a matrimonial union widowhood colonial rule, dynastic uncertainties, and individual sorrows etc. through the narrative of *Raj*. These difficulties don't restrict or hold her in the state of her experiences forever. Through serving Rajput ideals of valour, honour, and

duty at the service level she alters them. Her survival acquires political significance as it involves protecting her immediate family and the larger community.

*"I am sati now!"*  
(Mehta, *Raj* pg no: 165).

Female resilience through care, grief, working, and spiritual survival is evident in *A River Sutra* when the women are presented. The younger sewer who struggles to provide basic necessities for Imrat illustrates how poverty, grief, and a sense of insecurity do not lead to abandoning responsibility, but that these things, in particular, women still carry out. The Vano woman's strength is through hard work, their local wisdom, and their connection with nature. The Narmada River is a symbol of endurance because the water keeps flowing continuously, which shows the suffering connected with remembering, renewing, and living through one's culture.

*"I cannot take my brother because he is blind"* (Mehta, *A River Sutra* pg no: 36).

Endurance, for the *Snakes and Ladders* game, goes hand in hand with self - respect and being economically dignified. Mehta points out that poor women are the ones who are hit hardest by debt, migration, informal labour, and exploitation. At the same time, there is a lot of hope if they join and participate in collective organizations like SEWA. In this way, women not only defeat the moneylenders but also make their lives better by taking back control.

*"[S]elf-employment and economic independence"* (Mehta, *Snakes and Ladders*, *"Banish Charity"* pg no:37).

And, Mehta emphasizes that the concept of women's agency encompasses not just the role of individual women, but their development in various facets like community, shared responsibility, self-reliance, preservation of cultural heritage, and joint efforts. It is political to survive - this is Jaya's political survival. In *"A River Sutra"*, a River, a female last, a female care in the hands of their across, and their financial strength come to their aid when they are in *"Snakes and Ladders"*.

## 9. Conclusion

It has been pointed out that Mehta does not confine the role of women to being only victims of patriarchy nor does she paint them as fully liberated heroines. Rather, in her work, the authority of women is shown as rooted in history, based on conditions, strategic and multi-faceted. The female subjects in this context

are constantly negotiating these systems based on knowledge care labor memory resilience, and group actions. They are actually aware of their position in gender class religion family colonial power, and economic inequalities but still, they make room to change these things by the means of the same tools, for example, collective memory, labor care knowledge resilience, and mutual cooperation. *A River Sutra* The representation of a woman's authority in this work is done very uniquely for being sacred symbolic narrative and ethical.

Narmada symbolizes the female sacred element and relates to woman's desires and fertility danger spiritual endurance and the passing on of culture. Women like Vano women, young embroiderer, Uma and woman musician show their individual agency through different roles- labors work care memory music survival and moral responsibility. The presence of these women is not a public one nor an official one but it has the capability to help a person get through the hardship they have to face and even be the reason they are able to react to a certain situation. Mehta's presentation of the women who are silent is a major feature of the novel. In *Snakes and Ladders*, Mehta reveals women's financial economic social, collective and verbal power. She combines elements of memoir satire politics, observation and reflection in the form of articles to highlight the situation of women's labor poverty migration, debt and informal employment. Through organizations such as SEWA, Mehta shows that with cooperative savings, small loans, skill development, self-employment, and collective support, among other means, women can attain financial dignity.

## Reference

1. Bhatnagar, M., and N. Bhatnagar. "The Fluidity of Tradition and Modernity in Gita Mehta's *Raj*." *Literary Endeavour*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2019, p. 13.
2. Bite, M. "An Exploration of Narrative Technique in Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, pp. 1-8.
3. Manimekalai, G. "Man's Eternal Quest for Significance in Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* and *Raj*." *Language in India*, vol. 17, no. 12, 2017, pp. 218-225.
4. Nalini, S. "Feminist Perspectives in Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* and *Raj*." *Research Scholar: An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2022.
5. Panigrahi, R. "Emerging Voices: Ecocriticism at the Crossroads in India with

NARRATING WOMEN'S AUTHORITY IN GITA MEHTA'S *RAJ*, *A RIVER SUTRA*, AND *SNAKES AND LADDERS*

Special Reference to Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*." 2025.