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# Socio-Cultural and Religious Taboos Trapped the South Asian Women: Analysing Female Struggle Against Male Chauvinist Society in Gita Mehta's *Raj*

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## Abstract

*This research explores Gita Mehta's prestigious place in Indian Writing in English. Being a female novelist, her writings raise the issue of women's identity. Her novel Raj mainly focuses on the culture, tradition, and political condition of India. According to her, women are trapped in the circle of religion, culture, tradition, and all social taboos. In this novel the heroine of Mehta, Jaya Singh breaks the shell of all such taboos and emerges herself as a new individual in society. This research paper will show how the novel Raj is viewed as a wide scope for feminist analysis. This research aims to explore and analyze how the protagonist, Jaya Singh along with other subordinate female characters struggles hard and creates their own space in the so-called male-dominated society. With the help of Judith Lorber's theoretical perspective of the social construction of gender, Judith Halberstam's female masculinity, and Judith Butler's notion of 'gender performativity' the research papers analyzes how gender roles and ideologies are socially constructed, not something considered natural. The finding highlights that gender is not something related to the presence or lack of certain genes. It is the product of society and culture made to suit the ulterior motive of patriarchy. The main conclusion to be drawn from this work is gender is not an inborn entity which is quite a political issue hence; the female characters deployed in the novel are claiming their 'space' in society.*

**KeyWords:** Gender roles, culture, subversion, construction, space, politics, masculinity, femininity.

## Introduction

Gita Mehta is a well-known novelist in India. Her novel *Raj* reveals the issue of Hindu women in Pre-independent and Post-independent India realistically. In *Raj*, we can discover a royal woman who is the sufferer of patriarchal society and the victim of male chauvinism. The story of the novel covers the progression of a female protagonist under the British Raj and her hardships. This research paper focuses on the transformation of the protagonist, Jaya. She dismisses her identity as an Indian Princess and struggles hard to emerge as a new politician. And this is how she claims her 'space' in the politics of India. The perspective of looking at something that has always been thought of as natural, something embedded within the body of an individual has changed. This research entitled "Claiming Space for Oneself: Politics of Gender in Gita Mehta's *Raj*" questions the universality of gender and attempts to analyze how gender roles and identities are not inborn physical qualities but rather are the product of society and culture one grows up in. But to do so, the reader should firstly be aware of the functioning of gender. This research proposes to make the reader aware of that functioning in the text *Raj*, a historical fiction set in between the 1890s and 1970s. Through the analysis of text, the researcher explores how gender roles are real only to the extent of being performed and is liable of being challenged and dismantled. It aims to advance the understanding of readers on gender representation and thereby, making them able to see how they have been institutionalized by this institution. By gender, we mean discursive institutions established with certain expectations, structure, origin, and history. Gender is so inscribed in our daily life that we do not notice it until something goes missing but if noticed carefully, we can see how it structures every aspect of our life. In all facets of our life, these gender ideologies play significant roles. Children learn to walk, behave, dress, move, eat etc. differently based on their gender category. Parents are expected to have different responsibilities and duties because they are male or female. Both boys and girls are treated differently and expected to play different roles because of their gender. Girls are not given guns and cars to play whereas boys are not ever seen with dolls and cooking stationeries. In short, people are taught what the appropriate way of behaving is and what to expect of themselves and others. These norms and values though seem inconsequential but plays important role in the exploitation of women.

Many cultures go beyond clothing and gestures to gender their children. "They inscribe gender directly into the bodies. In traditional Chinese society, mothers bound their daughter's" feet

into three-inch stumps to enhance their sexual attractiveness" (Lorber 1994, p.24). Though the novel does not show gendering done on the body, it sure does have ample evidence on behavioral gendering. The protagonist, Jaya is not the rebellious type where she overthrows all her assigned roles but she is not the submissive type either. She is brave, confident, authoritative, analytical, engages in infidelity, and so on. Jaya, the female character of the novel is endowed with stereotyped masculine characteristics and thus behaves differently from social expectations. The paper plans to expose all those instances in the text where characters reverse the social order and argues that gender roles are our performance i.e. what we do rather than what we are. It is not the first time that this novel is being researched. It has been analyzed in terms of colonial legacy, women's identity, gender duality, and historical validity but has left the void for the research exclusively on gender representation. The researcher intends to do that by following the lead of Judith Lorber's *Paradoxes of Gender*, Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, and Judith Butler's theory on performativity.

### **Literature Review**

Gender plays a crucial role in determining the 'space' in society. Gender is the social and cultural construction of norms and values; the construction that defines what means to be a woman or a man. According to Lorber, gender establishes the differences between men and women, despite the evidence that "women and men are more similar than different" (Lorber 1994, p.5). Within gender, an individual, based on his/her gender category is assigned roles and responsibilities and is bound to perform by those roles and responsibilities. Whenever a child is born, he/she is firstly assigned with the sex category based on genitals and thereafter begins the process of positioning him/her in either/or category of gender i.e. male or female. Once the gender is clear, the child is treated differently and slowly and surely started responding differently too. Boys always get gifts like a sports car whereas a doll's house is all time choice for girls. These norms are inscribed in the way people move, gesture, and even eat. Men and women in society learn to walk in a way that showcases their different position in society. Though these differences in treatment, on a surface level, do not seem to matter much, if we analyze them, they result in a subordination of one of the categories. It has confined the identity of an individual within society. An individual has to act in a certain way though he/she feels differently. Gender is not biologically determined but rather constructed by those who are in power. Regarding the power relationship Lorber opines, "It has changed and will keep on changing in the future, but without deliberate restructuring, it will not

necessarily change in the direction of greater equality between women and men" (Lorber 1994, p.6). He further says that it is an institution where an individual is taught what is expected of him sometimes by observing others while sometimes getting reprimanded or encouraged of his/her activities and then has to fulfill those expectations. Like all other social inventions, language, religion, education, etc., gender organizes human social life but at the same time gives the impression of 'ever-present reality' too. Because of this impression created by gender, people are deceived by the idea that gender is natural. An individual is masculine or feminine naturally. There is the presence of certain genes that makes people male and female, so there is nothing to be questioned about gender. However, this concept of gender being natural due to the presence of certain genes in the body is changing. At present, gender is considered an institution with expectations, structure, and impact. The institution whose structure can be examined and changing effects be researched. In the same line, Judith Lorber argues that "gender as an institution establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself" (Lorber 1994, p 9). Because of its hold in powerful areas of society, gender is managed and circulated. Because we tend to take gender for granted, we are not able to see how gender organizes our everyday lives. How our expectations and desires all in some way or other are the result of the gender we belong to. It goes on producing and reproducing to suit the change of time and in that way maintain its hold in society. Only if we resist these roles, we would be able to push the limits of established gender roles.

Judith Butler departs from the common assumption of sex and gender being the same. She argues that like gender, sex is also a construction and therefore the very basis of considering an individual male or female is constructed. According to her, "Gender is unnatural, so there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender; one may be 'masculine female' or 'feminine male'. A male can be equally feminine and vice-versa" (Butler 1990, p.46). She considers gender as a performance where an individual is pre-informed about his/her character and thereby acts according to that. So, one's gender identity is not the reflection of their intrinsic essence, but rather is a product of his actions and behaviors. She asserts that our everyday dress code, speeches, gestures, activities, etc. work together to produce what is thought to be the essential quality of being male or female. She argues that being a man or woman is not one's internal reality rather it is an ongoing process that gets continuously produced and reproduced. People go along with their

ascribed gender because of the morality as well as social pressure that enforces them but that does not mean the urge to behave differently within an individual goes away just like that. People by having surgery, cross-dressing, or some other means find their outlet in a socially acceptable way. But what is noteworthy here is that people behave differently from social expectations. Judith Halberstam talks about tomboys in his book *Female Masculinity* to analyze the differences in behavior. He asserts that girls during their early stage are more masculine but this masculinity is not because of some male genes or hormones rather it comes naturally out of them just like any other behavior. Only after a girl reaches her puberty stage and is in the position to threaten the order of gender, gender conformity descends upon them.

Judith Halberstam even claims that there are several pieces of evidence of female masculinity in our society be it in movies, literature, or theatres but it "has been blatantly ignored both at culture in large and within academic studies of masculinity" (Halberstam 1998, p.1). Indifference toward the existence of diverse masculinities in society does not make gender natural or its subversion non-existent. He even explains how by using several artificial artifacts masculinity is promoted in society. A male is not masculine because of his genetic construction but rather because of the ideologies working around him. He is brave that is why he is masculine; he is rational and therefore is masculine. Like these several other clichés are prevalent in society but what is so casually ignored is the point that the categorization of brave and rationality under masculine traits is construction in itself. "For Human beings, there is no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations" (Lorber 1990, p.25). Once our sex is distinguished, all the further process of gendering is done by society. These processes are consciously planned, evaluated, and then only circulated in society.

### **Research Objectives**

- To know about the status of women under socio-cultural pressures.
- To understand the effects of religious pressures on women.
- To present the issues of femininity and masculinity in the selected text.

### **Research Questions**

- 1- What are the reasons behind the socio-cultural and religious pressures presented in the selected text?
- 2- How has Gita Mehta presented the mindset of gender discrimination in her novel *Raj*?

3- How does the writer project male chauvinism in the selected text?

### **Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This research is qualitative in nature. With the help of Judith Lorber's theoretical perspective of the social construction of gender, Judith Halberstam's 'female masculinity', and Judith Butler's notion of 'gender performativity' the research analyzes how gender roles and ideologies are socially constructed, not something considered as natural. This research is based on textual analysis.

### **Textual Analysis**

Gita Mehta's *Raj*, being historical fiction, has always been appreciated for its factual data collection and vivid description of incidents. But along with that, several critics have looked for several other issues in the novel. For example, M.B. Gaijan looks at women's struggle for identity and existence in the novel. She argues that "*Raj* is a historical fiction but under the wheel of historical events it represents woman's struggle Jaya's constant struggle to deal with dignity" (Gaijan 2006, p.190). Throughout her essay, she has given hefty examples of Jaya's struggle followed by her explanation. Gaijan's way of the narrative is quite impressive. Those who have read the novel and those who have not, both can understand her point at first reading.

Few critics like K.C. Baral and Dhira Bhowmick etc. have analyzed the text by blending post-colonial analysis with gender, history, fiction, and politics which calls for the need to look at the text from a different perspective i.e. gender studies. K.C. Baral and Dhira Bhowmick in "In History, Fiction and Colonialism: A study of Gita Mehta's *Raj*" talks about the painful situation Indian rulers have to go through during British colonization. They even claim:

"The British sense of justice was meant only to strengthen the cause of the empire in utter disregard to Indian ethos and feelings. Any signs of resistance to the paramount power were ruthlessly suppressed with excuses in the name of justice and fear play and Indian rulers were left to intrigue flattery and imitation to hold on to their thrones thereby continuing to weaken the institution of monarchy in the country." (Bhowmick 1999, p.51)

Along with talking about these aspects, they even discuss how novelist writing about colonial pasts "privileges Indian point of view in response to historical events and happenings" (Bhowmick 1999, 48). In this way, K.C. Baral and Dhira Bhowmick talk collectively about history, fiction, and colonization and consequently miss out to elaborate on any particular subject in detail. Likewise,

Y. Jaya Sudha has examined gender duality evident in the novel in her essay “Gender Duality in Gita Mehta’s *Raj*.” She asserts that “Every human being is a blend of both masculine and feminine traits” (Sudha 2008, p.110) and brings forward all those instances where Jaya professes both characteristics. However, her claim lacks that credibility since she has focused only on her protagonist. We cannot generalize conclusions based on a single incident and that is what she has done. Despite all of those researches, none of them specifically focus on gender studies. Some of them have looked for colonial legacies, others have looked into historical aspects, and yet others have looked into women’s identity; which has left the space for research from the perspective of gender studies.

The novel *Raj* mostly concentrates on periods after and before India’s struggle for independence but along with that it even concentrates its significant part on women’s lifestyle and their transformation of identity in the royal family. Set in between the period of the 1890s and 1970s, the novel strikes upon the fact that even in those times subversion of gender roles was quite evident. Mehta brings out the masculine traits of her female characters and the feminine of males. This research paper proposes to uncover and analyze all those instances and deconstruct how gender is structured consciously, therefore has nothing to do with one’s biological configuration. It is more like a performance where we are informed of our (gender) roles and have to act accordingly. Our society is quite rigid when it comes to gender roles. It strongly believes that both genders have their respective responsibilities and they should perform according to that. One who does not conform is forced in one way or another, as we are hegemonized by the idea that if someone does not possess their respective traits, there is something wrong with him/her. But the problem with these stereotypical gender roles is that they are much biased. It justifies the inequalities done to women. As said by Louis Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* “Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, decisive: they cast women as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive” (Tyson 2006, p.85). Whatever we consider superior traits has been easily assigned to men whereas the inferior one goes to women. Such assumptions regarding gender roles do not apply to Jaya in the novel *Raj* though she has been forced to be submissive in her childhood days. Mehta has clearly described the psychological uphold these gender roles have upon people and how we anyhow try to belong to it if we behave otherwise. When Maharani feels that Jaya is getting overly educated, overly skilled, and overly curious which is out of character for traditional females, to make her belong to her social category starts to send her to rangoli and

music classes (*Raj* 44) and considers this act of hers as “repairing the damage done by Raj Guru and Maharajah” (*Raj* 94). What is to be noted here is that Jaya does not intrinsically possess these so-called "feminine traits" but rather is trained to possess them. She is trained in what it means to be a woman and expected to perform according to that. In short, instead of being born as a woman, she is made as one.

However, Jaya does not come out as such a feminine character but rather shapes herself as an inquisitive, courageous, rational, manipulative kind who finds excitement in hunting, rifle shooting, and playing games. She does not rebel strongly but is not seen submitting easily too. Whenever circumstances have threatened her dignity beyond the limit, she is seen fighting for herself. When prince Pratap orders her to dance with Englishmen, she does a deal with him and agrees to play polo instead of dancing (*Raj* 222). Similarly, when the future of her child was in threat because of the flamboyant nature of her husband, she proposes to be named “Regent Maharani of Sirpur, in the event of anything happening to Prince Pratap until Arjun is of an age to take the throne” (*Raj* 333) in exchange of saving him from the probable scandal that would abrogate prince from Sirpur. All these instances show the strength of her personality, a strongly believed masculine trait. In the same way, her inquisitive nature, again a masculine quality, is known with her first confrontation with the British lifestyle.

Women’s virtue and purity are a big deal in the patriarchal society where the male can indulge in as many affairs as he wants but when it comes to women it is associated with words like honour and reputation. Mehta challenges these biased norms and values in the novel by portraying Jaya, a female indulging in infidelity. Though being married, Jaya gets sexually involved with Arun Roy and has fleeting feelings for James Osborne too. She is afraid of being caught but does not stop herself from having voyeuristic pleasure regarding James Osborne.

“Conscious of James Osborne seated at her side, Jaya was unable to concentrate on the conversation about the royal visit. Without looking at him she could feel changes in the Angrez boy, the way his slim body has filled out into a man’s frame, yet kept some point of vulnerability under the military carriage. Deep lines scarred the skin on either side of the mouth, and Jaya remembered he had been in battle, on one front or the other for the last eight years.” (*Raj* 214)



The expression ‘without looking at him’ conveys the unwritten rules of gender where a woman, more particularly a married one, is not allowed to check out males unabashedly. But Jaya’s awareness of subtle changes in James Osborne features points out that she has already rejected such rules. Her rejection of these gender roles becomes more prominent in the case of Arun Roy. In the former scenario, she is just an observer but, in the latter, she is an active participant. She gives in to her desires for Roy.

“Hands loosened the folds of her silk sari. The breeze was cool against her bare limbs as his mouth moved down her body as gently as the leaves falling with the gust of wind. She felt herself expanding to contain not just Arun Roy’s desire, but the jungle itself, seething with its predators and prey. The southing of the high elephant grass enveloped the manchan, as soft as the rustle of Roy’s falling clothes, then she was in his arms, her thick hair like a garment between his hands and her naked body.” (*Raj* 416)

From the above excerpt, it is clear that Jaya unlike traditional married women who place their husband’s needs as a top priority goes for her own needs and desire. Her desires and needs are not only physical. She even attends to her urge to learn polo, hunting, clay shooting (qualities of male), and many others. The passion and perseverance Jaya feels while hunting indicates another masculine touch in her character: "The sharp crackle of breaking sticks sounded behind her. Jaya swung around. The tiger has moved downwind of the elephant. Only a hundred feet away, it was crouched on its powerful hind legs to spring. Without conscious instruction from her brain, Jaya squeezed the trigger and shut her eyes for a split second" (*Raj* 85). These examples suggest the idea that gender is a construction that has nothing to do with the presence or lack of certain genes in an individual. There is nothing biological in it. It all depends on the society and culture an individual grows up into. If taught otherwise, a female can be equally masculine and a male can be equally feminine. Jaya in the text has been taught to be brave "explaining that a Rajput princess had to learn endurance" (*Raj* 47) and, therefore, does not cry easily like normally females do.

Besides Jaya, Kuki- Bai, Mrs Roy, Lady Modi too reverse their roles. Kuki- Bai is a brave woman. She proudly claims that "Lion of Balmer loved me because I was the only human being apart from himself who does not know the meaning of fear' (*Raj* 46). Her adventurous nature is known when she does one act in her youthful days for the royal children. “The elephant wound its trunk around Kuki-Bai’s waist and lifted her small figure into the air, holding her suspended until

her vermilion painted soles found balance on the ivory tusk” (*Raj* 55). Despite being a mere mistress of the king of Balmer, Kuki- Bai has achieved significant status in the royal family. The position where she is asked for her opinion regarding Jaya’s marriage. This reflects the strength of her personality. Apart from these masculine traits which are being brave, courageous, and formidable, Kuki- Bai is quite reasonable. She is aware of the fact that the King of Balmer has an antagonistic relationship with the British Empire and that is why Jaya needs to marry a family who is good in terms with the Empire. This will provide security to the princess which no other states can guarantee.

Kuki- Bai’s understanding of the actual situation and her suggestions for that situation is distinguishable. Reality is different from one’s imagination and one should always work based on reality rather than fantasy. Kuki- Bai is aware of this and that is why suggests Jaya’s relationship with Pratap is not appropriate though Jaya protests against it. She very well knows only such kind of family will protect Jaya in the future. This rationality of Kuki-Bai is conventionally a masculine trait. In the same way, Mrs. Roy and Lady Modi are appointed to educate Jaya on English and Britisher’s lifestyle respectively. Both these characters are females but are highly educated. They have their perception regarding British people but a logical one. On one hand, Mrs. Roy informs Jaya of the British Raj hollowness: "Indians are dying like flies, but the indifferent British Raj has spent a million pounds of India’s money on tents, and another half-million pounds on an Imperial crown" (*Raj* 81). On other hand, Lady Mody informs Jaya to be less passionate. She exclaims, “This is the era of negotiations, not heroism” (*Raj* 260). So, Jaya needs to be practical and keep her anger in check. Though Lady Modi is the one who is highly influenced by the British sense of good and bad it is also to be noted that she has made her place in the age where breaking out of purdah was also a big deal. She is equipped in a way that she is appointed by royal families to teach. When Prince Pratap is dissatisfied with Jaya’s lack of knowledge of languages like Italian, Spanish, and French, and the conduct of western society, he decides to appoint "a highly respectable Indian Lady from Bombay who is just the person to teach you the intricacies of western society" and that is Lady Modi (*Raj* 192). She is equipped with foreign languages and a foreign way of living. She is highly sophisticated. She teaches Jaya how to make Martini, one of the alcoholic drinks, and have it herself too. "Without stopping to breathe she finished her Martini" (*Raj* 194) and orders for the next glass. These traits (having drinks, skilled in foreign languages, being sophisticated) are certainly not what traditionally women are supposed to possess. Her

knowledge of external affairs is also remarkable. She informs Jaya about other princes' time and again and in a way keeps her up to date: "Bikaner represented India at the signing of the Versailles Treaty at the end of the war, and then at the opening of League of Nations. As for Alwar- both British and Gandhi have called him the most intelligent ruler in India... "(*Raj* 245). Though unintentionally, Lady Modi's abundant knowledge of what goes around has helped Jaya a lot. She even reminds Jaya that there is nothing wrong with her and her personality. It is just that she represents everything Pratap has been taught to hate and therefore reflects her practical nature.

Gender theorist Judith Lorber in her book *Paradoxes of Gender* argues, "Like any other social institution gender exhibits both universal features and chronological and cross-cultural variations that affect individuals. As is true of other institutions, gender's history can be traced, its structure examined and its changing effects researched" (Lorber 1994, p.1). Gender does have some features that can be seen in all kinds but at the same time, it even varies culturally. Different cultures at some point difference in their notion of what it means to be a man or a woman. The notions themselves keep on evolving to accommodate the changing circumstances. In the text, Jaya has to go through the transformation of her personality because Balmer's notion of being a female differed from that of Britishers and Pratap wants Jaya to be like a typical white woman. She is forced to unlearn what she has been taught means being a woman in Balmer: long hair, painted hands, having flowers in your hair, wearing a sari, domestic knowledge (*Raj* 191) and thereafter is taught how to be like a woman of British Empire: "short hair, plucked eyebrows, wearing gloves, carrying handbags" (*Raj* 195) and all that. If gender as perceived by society is an inherent human attribute, then its definition would have been the same regardless of time and location. If that were the case, changing and subverting gender roles would not have been possible. But its definition varies culturally and therefore makes its change and she claims her space.

Jaya's mother who at the beginning of the novel is so into her established roles that being out of it seems great dishonor to her. She exclaims that "My predecessors would have killed themselves rather than endure such dishonor" (*Raj* 33) but she is also among the ones who subvert their gender roles fiercely. The total change in her personality is evidence of the claim that gender is a construction where changes and subversion can occur. Maharani overthrows her assigned roles first by "moving out of Balmer Fort" (*Raj* 234) and thus breaks the traditional purdah system. She takes the lead in her life and decides effectively what has to be done with it; the essential quality of a male. "She sold her jewelry, and from the proceeds, she has made a school, a dispensary, and

an ashram for the needy" (*Raj* 235). All her actions in no way place her in the category of 'female'; meek, submissive, passive, etc. She discards her traditional world, and traditional personality and adapts to the new one which normally is thought to be of males. The most significant change in her personality is the one where she decides to take part in the revolution to break Salt Laws. The Maharani at the beginning of the novel who was ashamed to break the simple tradition of purdah has gone to the extent of taking part in a revolt. The revolt which surely involves blood, violence, determination, courage, and perseverance is not the characteristic of women. But Maharani takes part in it and proves the presence of these attributes in herself. She is even ready to get imprisoned if it means achieving her goal. She states clearly "I am free to follow the path of truth, even if leads to jail" (*Raj* 374). This overturns of her personality would not have been possible if being a woman was her intrinsic essence.

By physical appearance, they are certainly males and even get addressed with the masculine pronoun 'he' but their gestures and movements are that of a female. Giggling, clapping, and dancing are mostly feminine traits and eunuchs do have these feminine traits. Even in the novel *Raj*, Mehta has presented a detailed description of their singing trait. One eunuch began singing in a high-pitched voice:

"Oh, there is a lovely woman  
Who lives in a magic garden  
Filled with honey and fruit  
But the gates to her magic garden  
Lies, alas, between her thighs." (*Raj* 107)

These lines with sexual connotations have been sung by eunuchs followed by another one. Here, what is important is not what they are expressing through these lines but their involvement in such activities. Apart from this, in the novel, eunuchs are addressed with the pronoun 'he' and it is evident when the narrator describes a scene where she states "The Chief eunuchs grunted with effort as 'he' struck particularly hard opium pellets with 'his' pestle" (*Raj* 104). But they are part of "Malwar ceremony" (*Raj* 104) where men are absent. The presence of a eunuch in ceremonies where males are not allowed but being addressed with masculine pronouns itself questions their gender status. Thus, by introducing identities like eunuchs, Mehta has reversed the established social order.

In the book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam even claims that masculinity “is primarily prosthetic and in this (James Bond) and other countless other action films, has little if anything to do with biological maleness and signifies more often as a technical effect” (Halberstam 1998, p.3). That means that a male is masculine not intrinsically but because of the ideologies revolving around him. Masculinity which is often attached to the male body is a construction where through several materialistic and idealistic impressions he is turned into a man. In the movie because of the gadgets like a retractable belt, a bomb disguised as a pen, a half smile, and cigarette, and so on, Bond is presented as a masculine figure. If we detach these gadgets from Bond there is nothing extraordinary about his personality. The same is the case with Prince Pratap in the novel. His constructed masculinity becomes clearer when we look at how his whole personality is valorized just because the title ‘Prince’ is attached to him.

Traditionally, a male is supposed to be rational, responsible, always in control of his emotions, a provider of his family, protective, and all that. But when we look for these characteristics in Prince Pratap he possesses almost none of them. He is brave but along with that he is irrational, and because of him his child’s future comes under threat. This in turn, also mars his image of being a provider and caretaker for his family. He also becomes uncontrolled when faced with challenges. All these traits are considered of females and since Pratap possesses them, he has also tarnished his typical gender roles. He is not able to fulfill the desire of his wife too. There comes a moment when Jaya feels disgusted with his touch. The narrator in the novel describes Jaya’s emotion: “she pushed him away, fighting back the waves of disgust that threatened to overcome her self-control” (*Raj* 333). Similarly, when comes the time to face the problem of Esme Moore, Pratap instead of taking lead and solving his problems, gets drunk and whines regarding the problem “he moved unsteadily toward his wife. What am I going to do? Bikaner and Patiala won’t let me attend any meetings until this matter is resolved. Wish the bloody whore would drop dead.” (*Raj* 333), which again is certainly not a quality of traditional male. A true king and a husband gets troubled when has to hand over his state to someone he thinks as incapable but Pratap “Laughing, threw the envelope (Viceregal seal) on the bed and left the room” (*Raj* 338). For him, it does not matter who becomes Regent of Sirpur after his death. All that is important for him are the papers protecting him from the scandal of Esme Moore. It highlights his imprudent nature toward his estate. That is why Pratap’s masculinity is also a construction.

Maharajah Victor goes in the same line as Prince Pratap. Instead of being responsible for his state and people, he is more interested in Cora Hart, an American actress. He is inconsiderate toward the plight of his people in particular and his nation as a whole. A stereotypical version of the king, a masculine figure is not like Maharajah Victor "who has already bought Cora Hart everything from most expensive jewelry and fur coats to a racehorse. Now is thinking of buying her villa in France" (*Raj* 274). Both brothers keep on whining about their problems instead of solving them and being rational. They act differently from the expectation of society that is to be rational and unemotional and thus make the reader conscious of the point that these expectations which we assume to be natural themselves are a construct of society.

## FINDINGS

Gender is so pervasive in society that we take it for granted. Something we believe is in our genes and, so is not to be questioned. It is hard for people to believe that gender gets constantly created and recreated. It starts with the assignment of sex to a baby based on his/her genitalia and after that begins positioning of that sex in either/or category of gender. Once a child's gender is evident, everyone treats them differently. One gender is certainly treated differently from the other and the children respond to different treatment by feeling different and behaving differently. So, "Gender, like culture is a human production that depends on everyone constantly doing gender" (Lorber 1994, p.13). We do gender, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, by categorizing people within the category of male and female. Parenting is gendered where expectations are different between father and mother. Whenever we see an individual, we look for clues in him/her that determine which is his gender. A baby with a sports T-shirt is a boy where as a baby with a pink skirt is a girl. Based on that information, we treat them differently. All these processes constitute the social construction of gender.

The text *Raj* does not fail to garner our attention on its subversive part. The research paper manifests gender construction and its subversion in the novel in detail. And thereby concludes that the heroine of this novel along with other female subordinate characters has created their own 'space' in society. Though Mehta has not overturned these gender roles in rebelling way, she sure does have shown how it is inverted. The confidant, courageous, analytical Jaya in many ways goes against the expectation of society and reverses her roles. The remarkable part of the text is that it is not only the protagonist who overthrows her roles, but its subordinate characters are also like

that. They have their thought process and does act on them. Through the presentation of characters like Jaya, Maharani, Lady Modi, Mrs. Roy, Chandani, and others, Mehta subverts the traditional notion of gender representation.

The textual analysis of the text *Raj* leads us to conclude that gender is after all a construction. It is more of what we do rather than what we are. It gets produced and reproduced within society and because of this continuous process starts being considered an eternal reality. The genetic qualities within an individual have nothing to do with one being masculine or feminine. Gender is the product of the culture and environment an individual gets acquainted with. So, if our culture raises a girl the way it raises their boys or vice-versa, girls can be equally masculine and boys can be feminine. How Jaya challenges the roles she has been traditionally assigned forms the main focus of analysis. But along with that the novel even explores the gender subversion done by other subordinate characters.

The development and survival of Jaya's identity within the socio-political environment in which she stands to find herself is a major concern of the novel. Mehta does not allow her heroine to be pushed into a subservient role in her married status. She quietly fights the network of the power structure" keeping herself within the boundaries of morality and prudence that her society has defined for herself and within the orbit of her restricting domestic sphere. Similarly, she plunges into welfare work, building roads and dams, schools, and dispensaries because she wants to prove to the Reformists that rulers still have the welfare of their subjects and also to withstand the efforts of the Reformists to sway her subjects against her.

Again, it is she who, after much deliberation and advice from her several mentors, decides to have Sirpur merge with free India much against protests and anger from the conservative quarters of her Kingdom. But the climax of Jaya's emancipation comes when she decides to stand as an independent candidate from Sirpur for elections in independent India, against Arun Roy who has been Jaya's mentor since her Balmer days. Mehta not only gives an ironic twist to the Jaya-Arun Roy relationship but emphasizes Jaya's political maturity also. Arun Roy has all along pretended friendship with Jaya, and has even succeeded in seducing Jaya in Sirpur itself where there is a strong Reformist rising which Jaya and Sir Akbar are hoping Roy will be able to defuse. But instead, the day after he has gone tiger-hunting with Jaya, he is heard making fiery speeches against the princes of India. Jaya acts swiftly and challenges Arun Roy on his ground.

## **Conclusion**

Mehta portrays the movement from colonization to the Indian Independence simultaneously as she portrays the struggle which Jaya undertakes to free herself from the yoke of gender and imperial power politics of which she is a victim. Jaya's acquiring her gendered and national identity as a 'democrat' coincides with India's acquiring its identity as a 'democracy'. By the time the novel ends, Jaya gradually develops and emerges as a mature woman who identifies her 'space' in society. As Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* quotes: "A woman who is not afraid of men, frightens them" (Beavoir 2011, p.698). As the novel proceeds further, Jaya goes through self-analysis and self-realization. She transforms herself into a strong woman despite all troubles being still there in her life. After India attained Independence, she leads a meaningful life by serving her people not as Maharani but as one of them. True to her name Jaya which means victory, she succeeds in the general election. She is projected as a free, self-confident, self-reliant woman of free India. Eventually, we see that Gita Mehta's *Raj* deals with social hypocrisies and the identity of Jaya is interwoven with anguish and conflict to depict today's world. Jaya is evolved into a strong freedom fighter who empowers herself to win over her husband and creates space in her personal as well as political life. By doing major and minor character role analysis with the help of ideas by gender theorists like Judith Lorber, Judith Butler, and Judith Halberstam, the research is deduced to the point that the novel has subverted the overall traditional gender roles and all the female characters have claimed their space in their personal as well as political life. If we observe our everyday life, there are several examples of female masculinity.

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