



**BREAKING STEREOTYPES OF INDIAN CULTURE:
AN EXPLANATORY STUDY OF GITA MEHTA'S
'KARMA COLA' AND 'RAJ'**

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Abstract

East-west encounter in the Indian writings has exhibited a significant area of concern. Gita Mehta's works "Karma Cola", "Raj", "A River Sutra" are the focus of this paper, where the novels will be analysed to explore the stereotypical assertion of the East by the West. Hence, the objective of the study is to break the stereotypes of India by capturing brief insights into the real-life in India. The study attempts to further take a mocking view of the Western belief which will help understand the representation of India from a western perception. Hence the primary focus of the research will be to evaluate the cultural representation of India critically.

Keywords: Stereotypical assertion, Western misconception, Indian society, Indian stereotype

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1. Introduction

For ages, the representation of the Indian culture, its values and traditions by the Western media and literature has fallen in the lines of stereotyping, where there is a single style of representation that shows patriarchal men, meek women, shoddy streets and poor and dilapidated life all around. The lack of versatility or any shift in the age-old representation reflects on the inability of the Western society to accept the shifts and cultural, social and economic shifts that are happening in the country. Westerners during the '60s and '70s heaped together to India in search of spiritual enlightenment. Being fed up with the consumer-driven lifestyle, in a flock people from the West moved to India; which of all elements have been treated by Gita Mehta in her works such as 'Karma Cola' and 'Raj'. The novels point out the harsh yet mocking reality that spirituality is used as a commodity concerning trade and belief. The novels directed the reader to the assertions that the so-called Vedic gurus and mystic teachers blindly deceive the Westerners and at the same time pollute the culture and religion of India. The people living in the East found magic and mystery which seems to be missing in the lives of the West. Neither the West try to understand the depth of the spiritual concepts nor Indian seekers make them know and attain salvation, and when failed to achieve so, falls toward extreme illusion, confusion and chaos. Mehta's works, selected for this study, explain the precise meaning of the teachings of Indian spiritual guru and ways of enlightenment. There are excerpts from the novel that details the real understanding of Indian religious teachings. Attaining spirituality and salvation is the most challenging path which is vividly pointed out by Gita Mehta. She presents the tricks and deceits of the gurus through incidents that fascinate the West, a mockery not just at

the Western misconceptions, but also at the commercialisation of age-old customs and traditions to appease the desires and dreams of the West. Recently, Indian Mysticism has become a platform for marketing business, which has been a topic of discussion since its time of revival into the public light. Traditionally, it is believed that Gurus indeed possessed the healing powers, as they had ultimate control over their desires. India being the diverse land of cultures values its traditions, customs and rituals. India has a long tradition of preserving its culture with minute detailing. The life of Indian gurus and their devotees, both Indians and foreigners, in the ashrams is also portrayed by the author, where she points at the impact it has, not only on a single culture but both on the Western and the Indian culture. Coagulation of misconceptions, stereotypes and mockery of culture and emotional intelligence, the market of traditional beliefs and customs to and fro. With their preconceived notion of India as a land of mysticism, the Westerners seek for instant remedies for their existential issues with the ideology that, however naively or foolishly, that they could gulp down the Indian philosophy and could revel in the esoteric realms. The oratory and rhetorical writing mannerisms of Mehta are that of a business-oriented enthusiast who is keen upon mapping the transactional outcome and profit that Indian merchant - fake gurus and pundits - actually made by befooling the western foreigners. What is further asserted by Gita Mehta in this vibrant yet righteous and resurrection novel is that "the unscrupulous Indians really took disadvantage of their faith, however blind, and exploited these foreign seekers in every possible way. This phenomenon resulted in trauma and mental imbalance for many of the visitors and India was put on the international canvas for wrong reasons. Gita Mehta explores this situation

brilliantly and brings out a lively yet hard-hitting book that takes to task the instant Nirvana seekers and their instant fake gurus”.

The current study aims to explore and evaluate the cultural representation of India critically. The destination relating to the investigation are to be study the realistic perception of Cultural India and its contradictory views critically, to capture the brief insights into the real-life in India by breaking the stereotypes, to provide the analysis of the fake Indian mystics and the western native seekers and to portray the hippie influx in India and its repercussions on both Western and Indian societies through the work of Gita Mehta.

Cultural India and the Fake Indian Mystics:

With the introduction and establishment of the hippie movement in the United States of America in 1960s and its spread to other countries by mid-sixties is indeed viewed as the fore-runner in the assertion and practice of the fake Indian mystics by the fake Indian gurus as well as its acceptance and celebration by the Western society. As pointed out by researchers, the works of Gita Mehta, especially 'Karma Cola' is a representation and true-story narration about the influx of the Westerners into India, the Nirvana seekers- the Hippies, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones- who invaded the East in search of peace, did not accept or embrace the Indian mysticism as it is. Instead, it was westernized and white-washed to the extent where it became white enough to be accepted by Western society.

Various Indian writers, like Gita Mehta, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and so on attacked the ideology and representation of the Eastern ideologies through the Western eyes and pointed out the move of Westerners over India to explore the karmic principles, karmic concepts and the fake spiritualists who spread the secret thoughts for their

benefits and gains. Westerners during the '60s and '70s heaped together to India in search of spiritual enlightenment. Being fed up with the consumer-driven lifestyle, in a flock people from the West moved to India. Attaining spirituality and salvation is the most challenging path which is vividly pointed out several critics, who point out that the Western culture, desires to attain the fruit without going through the actual process. The degenerating new race and it's fake, tarnished, blemished and transient ideologies so much embedded in the lifestyles of the youth and the erupting new generation are not just words in literature, but a reflection of the reality that surrounds the Indian mystics, its culture and traditionality.

The Portrayal of the Western Misconception of the East and Cross-Cultural Relations:

Indian culture is a communion of different cultures emerged out of its secularism and the Indian philosophy defines religion as a way of life. By practising religion, a person can understand the true meaning of life and attain salvation. All religions preach the same, but paths are different. However, researchers and Indian writers point out that, when the theme of Indian culture and its related traditionality is treated by the Western counterparts, the culture and its authenticity is never retained but lost in the process of Westernising the Indian culture, so that it fits the mould of the alien culture. As per the views of Bose (2016), the works of Gita Mehta does not take a step back or ease the process of representing the truth as it is. And while doing so, the author does not stand by or favour any specific religion but blatantly mocks the Western ideocracy and Eastern follies in the name of spirituality and tradition. In the name of spirituality, fake gurus cheat the foreigners in all the possible ways like sexual harassment, spiritual malpractice, and overcharging in selling the things.

People from different parts of the world usually get carried away by Indian religious heritage.

Gita Mehta's 'Karma Cola' and 'Raj' are eye-openers dealing with the exploitation of the people in the name of spiritualism. People swayed from Eastern and Western civilization, which later on necessitated the presence of Guru or guide, who undertakes the guiding the ignorant people to bring clarity towards life. In other words, the guides enlightened the common man, cleared the imaginations and hallucinations in that process. Indian culture is diverse and at the same time unique. India is known for its multi-culture, and thus, spiritualism also plays a vital role in forming the culture; where it comes easy to exploit the unsuspecting man in the name of spirituality and 'the journey to find oneself'.

A Focus on Indian Cultural Values and Stereotypes:

As a land of culture, traditions and ideologies that stand apart from that of the world around, the Indian culture and its characteristics are bound to create contradictory views in the Western conception. With the differing representations such as that of the temples, IT companies, slums and luxury homes, there is an indefinite structure. However, studies and explorations point out that, even though the representation of the country has indeed shifted in the recent times, with respect to the real changes happening in the country, there is still a moment of hesitation when it comes to the mainstream acceptance; acceptance that India, as a nation, has indeed achieved its place in the realm of technological, social, economic and cultural growth. Critics point out that, for the Western population, India stands for colourful attires, busy roads with elephants and cows blocking the road and brown-skinned people who fancy the 'white' man coming to their homes. It is still the same representation as

that of the 60s, as it is in the twenty-first century. Gita Mehta opines that guides or gurus changed the life as at least 'twice a week these sophisticated urbanites would shed their brushed denim for badly tied saris and come and roll their eyeballs at each other for an hour, in deadly earnest,' where the texts explore the deeper and more truer layers of the reality and its assertions in the minds of the Western population; hinting at the need to move ahead of the stereotypical representation and expectations.

2. Findings and Discussions:

Through her works, Mehta explains her insights and shapes modern India exploring the real India along with the readers. She provides the reader with an opportunity to understand the cultural value attributed to motherland India. Thus, Mehta has an exceptional power of storytelling that attracts the readers deeply. Gita Mehta is fascinated by India's richness covering folklores, beliefs and faiths of common people and the tribesmen as well, superstitions, highly rich cultural values and politics, its traditions and customs. It is also understood that there has always been a continuous conflict between the West and the East which Mehta desired to represent through her works. Particularly talking about her works, it can be noted that there's a change in the flow and structure of the writing pattern from one work in comparison with the other. When 'Karma Cola' explains the world that Indian mysticism is a serious business and not a commodity; 'Raj' explores the lacking development in Indian scenario.

Being a diasporic writer, Mehta had the experience of living in different regions influenced her to carry intellectual perspectives making her stand unique in the modern Indian English Literature and the current paper attempts to bring forth the reality behind the Westernized

representations of India, by breaking the stereotypical portrayal of the Indian culture, traditions and the social life along with it, as well.

3. Conclusions:

Upon exploring the various papers and selected works of Gita Mehta, it can be ascertained that Gita Mehta's books are a kind of in-depth investigation into ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what has shaped modern India. From a detailed study conducted, it is observed that Gita Mehta is fascinated by India's richness covering folklores, beliefs and faiths of common people and the tribesmen as well, superstitions, highly rich cultural values and politics, its traditions and customs. It is also understood that there has always been a continuous conflict between the West and the East which Mehta desired to represent through her works. Mehta does not attempt to portray a polished image of her homeland, but instead shows it in its entire true colour. Through her works, Mehta explains her insights and shapes modern India exploring the real India along with the readers. She provides the reader with an opportunity to understand the cultural value attributed to motherland India. Thus, Mehta has an exceptional power of storytelling that attracts the readers deeply. Being a diasporic writer, Mehta had the experience of living in different regions influenced her to carry intellectual perspectives making her stand unique in the modern Indian English Literature. Mehta's works also develop the assertion that that modern India is the mixture of traditional and contemporary elements and the misconceptions of the Westerners regarding Indian mysticism, in a way, leads to the development of business in the country.

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