

The Archetypal LaxmanRekha in Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli'

Muktaja V. Mathkri

An archetype can be called a universally understood symbol, term or pattern of behaviour upon which others are copied, patterned or emulated.

Carl Jung, early in the 20th century, stated the existence of countless forms which are universal and which channel experiences and emotions. These forms result in the recognizable and typical patterns of behaviour with certain probable results. Jung discussed the use of archetypes and the resultant illumination of personality and literature. Archetypes, according to him, have been present in folk lore and literature for thousand years, which include prehistoric art work also. Archetypes are thought to be important to both ancient mythology and modern narrative.

An archetype is the product of the 'collective unconscious' and is inherited from our ancestors. Certain behavioural patterns have become established as more or less archetypal. The archetypal idea has always been present and diffused in human consciousness. Jung stated four main archetypes and one of them is 'The Anima—the feminine image in man's psyche'.

The Ramayana, the great Indian epic has Sita, Ram's wife as one of the major women characters and she exhibits a pattern of behaviour which has percolated in Indian literature since ancient times. Sita crossed the rekha, a line of restraint, clearly drawn by Laxman, her borther-in-law. As a result of that, she had to suffer and was, in a way, punished and her life became a series of rejections. This behavioural pattern, crossing the LaxmanRekha, the line of restraint, can be perceived as an archetype. It expresses Jung's idea of typical pattern of behaviour with certain outcome and this LaxmanRekha is deeply ingrained in human consciousness. This type of behavior on the part of the 'feminine' and its expected results express 'The Anima', that is the feminine image in a man's psyche. So, according to the researcher, LaxmanRekha can be interpreted as an archetype in itself.

Rama Mehata's **Inside the Haveli** deals with the quest for identity of two women, Geeta and Laxmi. The permitted and expected space for women is inside the Haveli. Geeta's movement is within the confines of the patriarchally defined space but Laxmi transgresses the laxmanrekha and is resultantly , punished.

Therefore, this paper aims at bringing out how the archetypical laxmanrekha in the great Indian mythology, **Ramayana** is still quite operative in **Inside the Haveli** and how it exposes the malpractices involved in patriarchy since women are made to move within the patriarchally defined space for them or otherwise, punishment is inflicted upon them.

The conclusions are: One, in **Inside the Haveli**, Rama Mehta maintains the existence of the stereotypical laxmanrekha; Two, Geeta who does not break away from the laxmanrekha her domestic space, is honoured but Laxmi who interrogates the controlling power of laxmanrekha and crosses it, is punished yet she is able to assert herself as an individual though she has to rebel against it.

In the initial part of the novel, Geeta fits in the description of passive, virtuous protagonist of a fairy tale. J. Usher describes the qualities of such a heroine as “a beautiful girl’s modesty and virtue are without bounds, her kindness and sensitivity are matched only by her fairness of face. Eventually, her patience, passivity and tolerance are rewarded.”

Geeta conforms to the patriarchal norms initially but tries to search for her independent identity in the later part of the novel by ‘moving’ within her traditionally specified confines and as a result of this, she becomes determined to bring about change with a clear understanding of the possibilities in the future, her belief in her self-reliance, her capacity to take risk and to master the situation. The question arises whether she will retreat or proceed determinedly to face reality and be determined to change her immediate environment. Geeta certainly proves her determination to change her present with her clear knowledge of the possibilities about the future after having thoroughly understood the traditional and the modern elements. Geeta’s straying from the path of femininity demythologizes as J. Usher would put it “the traditional solutions like self sacrifice and romance”. In the face of difficulty Geeta submits to the authority of her in-laws, of course, with her own conditions and disobeys the law of patriarchy and therefore, rejects the fairy tale image and escapes the legacy of Cinderella and Snowwhite. But the author imposes a retreat upon Geeta since “the patriarchal gaze on women is one dimensional because it aims, both to obscure their depth and to deny their potential for mobility.

Thus Geeta’s movement is a way to resist her confinement and calls for an examination of social and female spaces. The author, thus domesticates the feminist dimension of her rebellion and invests her stability with moral values:- ‘the still woman is good and the wandering woman like Laxmi is evil. Geeta’s attempt at transgressing the space allocated to her, both physically and mentally leads to an interrogation of social and

sexual boundaries. Of course, the author seems to add a streak of ignorance and immaturity to Geeta's rebellion by creating the hope in the novel that as she grows she will benefit herself in the societal framework.'

So, from the beginning of the novel itself, the process of muting and subjugating Geeta seems to have started. Silence seems to be the traditionally proven strategy to win people. However, in the latter part of the novel, Geeta uses silence as a strategy to silence others.

The people of Udaipur see Geeta's marriage to Ajay as a 'risk' because she is an outsider according to them (p.15) it seems any society has a close-knit structure and they do not seem to be any readiness to accept a so-called 'outsider'. So, Geeta is perceived as an outsider because she is from Bombay and also because she is educated. Of course, the process of 'taming' or 'colonizing' her begins immediately after Geeta's arrival in Udaipur :- Pari, one of the servants, says, 'where do you come from that you show your face to the world? And covers Geeta's face with the veil. Pari also adds 'I know you are an outsider but its time you learned our ways. Daughters in law of his haveli do not behave like this, they do not enter the men's apartments' (p.17). There is a clear distinction between female space and male space indicated by the definite plan of the haveli.

Besides this perception are Geeta's fears of 'making mistakes' her yearning to talk with someone who could tell her what was happening in the world and her embarrassment by Ajay's occasional visits to her followed by the maids laughter since 'man was allowed to see his wife only in the night' (p.18). And therefore, in the initial part of the novel and also later on, Dhapu, Geeta's maid becomes her only support without whom Geeta thinks that she 'would have insisted on going back to her parents. She could not have taken the taunts about her upbringing with proper meekness' and thereby, to become an 'angel' in the eyes of the in-laws (p.19).

Surprisingly Geeta 'comes to love the veil that hid her face and she discovers that through her sari she could see everyone and 'yet not be seen by them' Parda has been subverted by Geeta as a strategy to create her own space. Another strategy to have a room of her own for Geeta is the twenty days seclusion when she delivers her first child because she enjoys 'the peace and quiet' of these days. She also tries to take comfort in the hope that her stay in Udaipur is 'temporary'. The thought of leaving Udaipur overcomes her depression in this phase of her life.

However, Geeta's education, the admiration and constant reassurance from her husband' (p.25) do not make her feel comfortable and even after two years in the haveli, she is nervous because the societal gaze and remarks like 'she will never adjust. She is not

one of us', certainly alienate and annihilate her. This leads to her loss of confidence which is again a result of the process of colonization by the patriarchal members of her family as well as Udaipur. There is a conscious attempt at 'moulding' and 'fixing' Geeta :- 'I want to show the people of Udaipur that even an educated girl can be moulded' (p.28), says her mother-in-law.

However, Geeta's retaliation is discernible when she says to Dhapu, 'I am fed up with all the pretence that goes on here. I hate all this meaningless fuss' (p.27). Geeta's previous belief in love changes to her not at all being 'sure about herself' (p.28). She undergoes a change within two years of her marriage and yet she is 'unable fully to control either her words or her feelings'. She feels on the one hand, like a heavy 'log of wood that had mobility' because her actions become mechanized but on the other, with the help of Dhapu, she transgresses her confined female space by going 'through a dark passage of the narrow stairs to the men's apartments 'to see the celebrations without being observed by anybody. Thus, Geeta's movement is from the 'angel' to the 'wandering woman' and this movement from angel to evil woman and from the evil one to the angel is recurrent in the novel. For example, she forgets her irritation and feels proud to be the young mistress of the haveli and values the great traditions of the family.

As said earlier 'neglect' and 'silence' are used as strategies for survival by Geeta as exemplified by her purchases of various things like books. She turns 'a deaf year to her mother-in-law's advice. However, her silence seems to be a burden to her because it chokes her. Recurrently in the novel, in the situations of depression, her husband's consoling words help her overcome her depression and they direct her to some new strategy also. Ajay says, 'help me to try and see what you could do in this atmosphere' (p.44). His words, on the one hand, are consoling but on the other, they are his expectations projected upon Geeta regarding her possible movement. Further Ajay's assertion of his stay in Udaipur only because of Geeta's adjustment to the haveli is also a marker of her fixation in the image of an 'angel'.

Once Geeta knows that she will have to lead her life in the haveli since Ajay negates all the chances of his going to Delhi, she feels relieved and tries to find out new strategies for her life ahead. For a possibly temporary phase, being an angel and 'speaking the language which the men want women to speak and wishing what men expect women to wish' as A. Loomba says is easy for Geeta but later on it becomes difficult.

After five years Geeta feels 'more at ease' though she accepts the discipline without protest and there are 'many times' also when she feels the crushing weight of the walls that shut off the outside world'. Hers is not a blind acceptance, knowingly, she moves from negation to assertion and again back to negation.

The author confirms the change that comes over Geeta by stating ‘the room seemed to suffocate her. She felt trapped in the haveli with its traditions and its unchanging patterns. She was filled with rebellion and she was determined not to be crushed by the haveli (p.81)’. It must be noted that regarding trivial customs, Geeta is ready to surrender but certain things pose a challenge before her and she becomes a crusader. Regarding Seeta’s schooling, Geeta seeks her father-in-law’s support instead of that of her mother-in-law’s since she knows that the women are very much rooted in patriarchy and that forces of patriarchy are unleashed not only by men but women also. This is also supported by Dhapu who advises her not to get into argument with the women in the haveli since they are mean and the men are generous and understanding’.

Consequently, the author imposes a retreat on Geeta by bringing out Geeta’s nullification of her own decision after having heard pari’s grievances. Regarding Seeta. She says, ‘I should not have interfered in Seeta’s life (p.85)’. Finally Seeta’s is sent to school with Geeta’s father-in-law’s support. It marks Geeta’s victory and the acceptance of her new ideas in the haveli. Yet Geeta shows readiness to withdraw Seeta from school when she gets a better understanding of servants’ conditions. This readiness on her part makes Geeta sound ambiguous at times but the author portrays Geeta’s perception as being sharpened as she pays visits to relatives and sees women who ‘look alike’ and understands their loss of identity.

Geeta’s training continues with her mother-in-law’s recurrent comments and advice like ‘in order to become one with the family, one must first learn to listen to one’s elders’. As a result of this training in to silence, it becomes easy for Geeta to conceal her feelings. Geeta is shown to develop through her exposure to life. This is noticeable when she talks to Ajay regarding Seeta’s education and the change in the haveli, ‘the change won’t come as quickly as you think. You don’t know the women here. They are all rooted in ignorance and superstitions (p.112)’. In the later half of the novel, the readers see Geeta’s mother-in-law and all the servants accepting and appreciating Geeta’s decision about Seeta’s schooling and nullifying their misconception about education; ‘education has not done Seeta any harm(p.118)’, says Geeta’s mother-in-law. A major confrontation that Geeta has to face is when she starts a school in the haveli for servants’ children and maids. This school is perceived as ‘bringing a bad name to the haveli’. But the conflict between Geeta and her mother-in-law ends with her father-in-law’s support to Geeta: I am proud of Binniji. Tell her to let me know if she needs any help. (p.128)’. As a result of this Geeta undergoes a change. She loves ‘the large empty rooms of the haveli, they no longer look unfriendly and haunted’ (p.130). Once Geeta’s classes are supported by her father-in-law, her mother-in-law also becomes a staunch supporter of the same.

Thus, Geeta heads towards empowerment in the haveli. Geeta's exposure to the society and its various strata improve her understanding of life and her social sense which are revealed by her statement when Maji, a relative opposes her classes for the poor maids : 'how dare she say that these classes were an excuse for women to shirk work. And what if they were, why should the young girls help the haveli just because their mothers were servants of the haveli' (p.135). Geeta, in this way, fights against the capitalist mode of life.

Having grown in such a way Geeta does not 'need anyone to fight on her behalf or give her moral support' (p.136). This is a signifier of Geeta's growth. Geeta becomes grateful towards her mother-in-law for her co-operation and she also becomes one with the haveli : 'how dare anyone say a word against the haveli and for the sake of it ,she would even discontinue her classes'. The haveli becomes the heaven for her : 'I don't want to leave Udaipur now. It has made me a willing prisoner within its walls. How stupid I was not to see all that it holds. Geeta , thus assimilates with the traditions of the haveli and internalizes its ways willingly. This is Geeta's new identity. She no longer feels 'trapped in the haveli'. She finds that she too had changed'. Of course, she does not like the rigidity with which the women held onto old customs. She could not become one with the haveli women nor did she want to' (p.142) .Geeta has grown into in an adaptable, fluid, intelligent and a wise woman who resents the rigidity of the heveli but also moves within the Laxmanrekha,that is within the haveli.

Yet Geeta appreciates the freedom that her in- laws have given her ' within the haveli to keep her occupied in the manner that satisfied her'. Geeta , thus ,makes her movement possible within her limited space and brings about a change in her immediate environment and also in her Self which is appreciated by the haveli. The author emphasizes that change is possible even in a limited space if one adjusts like Geeta and does not cross the line of restraint, the archetypal Laxmanrekha .

Geeta, the daughter-in-law who had the lowest status in the family is able to acquire equal status to the male members of the family. She is 'now allowed to sit in Bhagwatsingji's presence and even talk to him directly which was previously not allowed'.

All the servants who are grateful to Geeta express their feelings through Pari's statement: 'Binniji has changed the lives to these girls (maids) most of them can read and write. They can get work. They don't have to depend on havelis.'

The last confrontation between Geeta and haveli is when a proposal for marriage is brought for Vijay, Geeta's daughter who is twelve years old. Geeta's first reaction is ;-

'Vijay can't get engaged at this age'. Secondly, she thinks that she is being 'trapped and sees no escape this time' and therefore, she tells Ajay 'I have put up with enough in your family and I am not prepared to bend any more'. Geeta now, really knows the haveli. At the end of the novel, the author shows Geeta coming to terms with her Self and establishing her own space in the haveli and also seeking a position of power there.

Therefore, it may be stated that Rama Mehta, by showing Geeta's rebellion and at times, her immediate retreat tries to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, of course, she domesticates the feminist dimension of her rebellion and invests her stability with moral values: the still woman is good and wandering woman like Laxmi is evil. She creates her own space within the haveli and gains a higher status. Geeta creates her own space within her own limited confines yet she is able to bring about a positive change in her immediate environment.

Geeta seems to present an ambiguous character but she can also be interpreted as a synthesis between tradition and modernity. The author seems to be in favour of such a synthesis and for her, it seems to be a certain possibility.

Daphne, in her article 'Women's space: Inside the Haveli: incarceration or insurrection' stated that 'space is a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, a power-geometry of difference'.

A feminist reading of *Inside the Haveli*, brings out the unreleased energy of Rama Mehta's female characters, namely, Geeta and Lakshmi. The researcher proposes to bring out Mehta's attitude to female space and a female rebellion with specific reference to Lakshmi, a maid in the haveli. It is aimed to bring out how patriarchal thought endorses on women the possibility of movement only to control it by investing women's stability with moral values.

Lakshmi, a married maid, aged fifteen conforms to the patriarchal norms initially but tries to search for her independent identity in the latter part of the novel by 'moving away' from the traditionally specified confines and as a result of this, with a clear understanding of her Self and her belief in her capacity to take risk and master the situation, poses a threat to the 'patriarchal norms' represented by the haveli. Lakshmi's deviation from the path of femininity demythologizes as J. Usher would put it, 'the traditional solutions like self-sacrifice and romance'. It is even in the face of difficulty that Lakshmi disobeys the law of patriarchy and therefore, rejects the fairytale images of women and escapes the legacy of Cinderella and Snowwhite. However, Mehta who

shows Lakshmi in a pathetic light, seems to disapprove of a rebellion like that of Lakshmi's since it is a bit of conspicuous and seemingly immature one.

Inside the Haveli is not only a story of Geeta, a modern girl who represents a rebel and also a conformist, but it is also a story of Lakshmi who has to face internal as well as interpersonal problems. However, Lakshmi does not 'care what anyone said' but has to marry Gangaram, a servant in the haveli since it is decided by BhagwatSinghji's wife, the mistress of the haveli. Lakshmi finds 'everything wrong with Gangaram' and complains 'about his temper and tattered clothes' and 'blames the mistress for marrying her to him'.

Other older servants like Pari or Dhapu comfort Lakshmi but 'nothing convinces her that she was fortunate in having Gangaram as a husband' and therefore, she 'goes her own way, doing work when told to, otherwise sitting around day-dreaming'. Lakshmi also thinks of a strategy to subvert the system which confers upon woman some status when she becomes a mother and otherwise, oppresses her. Lakshmi says, 'I will have a child every year. This is the only way to get rest and comfort ... if only women were considered unclean for longer what fun it would be'.

According to another maids, Lakshmi is 'impossible to please'. Being aware of her right, Lakshmi is annoyed when she does not get her massage on time even when she pays for it. A gift of an old sari from the haveli enrages her because she can not be fooled easily as the sari 'won't stand even to washes'.

Being thus a restless soul, Lakshmi certainly has a potential for rebellion, movement and defiance. There comes a turning point in her life in the form of a present from Heeralal, a driver. She perceives it as an insult to her. Nevertheless, she is 'misunderstood and mistaken' which is the result of the patriarchal interpretation of women. The incident results into Lakshmi's husband losing his temper and calling her 'a rotten woman, a woman worse than a street woman'. He catches her by her neck as according to him, 'she is dirty'.

Lakshmi who is just like Eliza in Pygmalion, is led to react very defiantly and is not to bear any insult this time. At night, she 'hears her husband's accusing voice, 'you are a street woman. I never want to see your face again. You are a street woman'. As a result of this, 'her lips tighten and her body burns with rage. She smiles defiantly and leaves the haveli', leaving her child there only.

In the latter part of the novel, one sees the recurrent attempts on the part of the patriarchal haveli to bring Lakshmi back, the major aim being saving the fame of the haveli and the pretext is that her child needs Lakshmi. But Lakshmi does not give in once she has

broken away from her confined existence. She is defamed, rumours regarding her stay with various men are heard. Yet Lakshmi boldly refuses to 'retreat'. She tells Pari, 'I will not come back. Never! I will starve but never return to the haveli... I will show my husband that I am not a street woman either... Heeralal is a thief, a rascal... I know you all. For the rest of my life you will poke your fingers at me and say, 'that bad charactered woman. She enticed Heeralal to give her gifts. She would do anything for a sari'. I know your sweet words now don't mean any thing... I will never, never return to the haveli to be taunted and jeered at...'

Lakshmi's deserting the child in the haveli also can be interpreted as her strategy to teach a lesson to her husband who according to her 'should control his long, poisonous tongue'.

Lakshmi story does not end here. She has to lead a loveless and lonely life and even after a period of fifteen years she is not invited for her daughter's wedding as according to the master of the haveli, her presence will spoil her daughter's future. So, Lakshmi becomes an agonizing mother who can only give a 'shagun to her daughter without revealing her identity'.

To conclude, it may be said that Lakshmi has courage to be different and her movement is not at all a fake one. She leads a self supporting life, she does not elope with a man and does not at all seek the support of any man. So, her movement is not from one patriarchal plane to another but she creates her own space indigenously as she knows very much that patriarchal ideology blames not men but a woman and as a wandering woman that she is, she is to be labeled as 'evil' and not an 'angel'. She is not at all bothered about any label as she has asserted her Self.

Thus, the author seems to inflict a sort of punishment upon Lakshmi, since she has flouted the rules of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood in a patriarchal frame of reference. Lakshmi's movement is not at all justified or there is no glorification at all of her search for identity which she completes indigenously. She is shown in a pathetic light only to warn against the consequences of such a loud rebellion as hers. Geeta's rebellion, which is glorified, is a strategic one as she conforms to the patriarchal norms and yet moves within the space confined to her by patriarchy. But Lakshmi being illiterate, reacts, retaliates and rebels instinctively and not as strategically as Geeta. Geeta's is a slow rebellion but Lakshmi's is like an explosion which makes her suffer. So, Mehta approves of movement but only within the space designated to women by patriarchy and not at all beyond that.

References

- * Ardener, S, (ed.) (1981), **Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps**, Croom Helm, London
- * Bhatnagar, Manhoman, (ed.) (1981) **Indian Writings in English Vol. 1** Mehra press, Delhi.
- * Bhattacharya, S. (1990) **Indian Writing in English**, Sterling, Delhi.
- * Bowles, G. and Renate, D. (eds.) (1983) **Theories of Women Studies**, Routledge, London.
- * Cornillol, S. (ed.) (1972) **Images of Women in Fiction : Feminist Perspectives** , B.G. University Press, Ohio.
- * Jussawalla, Adil (ed.) (1997) **New Writing in India** Penguin, India.
- * Loomba, A. (1989) **Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama**, O.U.P., Delhi.
- * Mehta, Rama, (1965) **Inside The Haveli**, Rupa pub., Delhi.
- * Ramaiah, L. S., (1998) **Indian English : A Bibliographical Guide to Resources**, Gian publication house, Delhi
- * Ramamurthi, K. S., (1987) **Rise of the Indian Novel in English** Sterling publication , New Delhi.
- * Ray, Mohit,(2003) **Studies in Commonwealth Literature** Nice Printing Press, Delhi.
- * Ruthven, K. (1984) **Feminist Literary Studies**, Cambridge Univerasity Press, London.
- * Sharma, K. (1996), **Feminism and Literature**, Prestige, Delhi.
- * Singh , Sushila ,(ed.) (1991) **Feminism and Recent Fiction in English** Prestige, Delhi.
- * Woolf, V. (1929) **A Room of One's Own**, H.D.P. , London.