

Superstitions in Meira Chand's *House of the Sun****Parvaiz Ahmad Bhat****Research scholar**School of Studies in English**Vikram University Ujjain (M.P)***Abstract**

Meira Chand (1942-) is one of the best contemporary writers in diasporic literature. Her diasporic consciousness is nicely reflected through her works. She has produced more than six novels whose theme always revolves around diaspora. She has also described the belief of superstition in a praise worthy manner. She has explained this belief in a more lucid way. One of the prominent characters namely Mrs. Hathiramani has been depicted following this belief blindly. She has been contrasted with her husband who is no less than an erudite. But still he could not restrict his wife from following superstitious ways. *House of the Sun* is a beautiful depiction of Sindhi community. By writing *House of the Sun* author makes this thing apparent that one should not forget his/her culture even though if one is living in a better place than his/her native land. All this has been depicted through the theme of superstitions with which this paper deals.

Key Words: Identity, Sindhi, Saturn, Alienation, Sapphire.

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At the very outset of the novel, Meira Chand throws light on one of the prominent characters of the novel Mrs. Hathiramani, a middle-aged healthy Sindhi woman. It was afternoon in the late eighties Mrs. Hathiramani, climbed downstairs from her home on the fourth floor of Sadhbela, an apartment house in Bombay (renamed Mumbai in 1995), to visit her neighbour Bhai Sahib who was an astrologer. Bhai Sahib, was seated on the floor and examined the faded blue lines of Mrs. Hathiramani's horoscope and suddenly halted at a page that showed the phases of the sun, drawn with a flourish and had a mustached human face rounded with lotus petals. "The Sun is now Lord of the Tenth House and occupies the Ninth. In March Saturn is coming into the House of the Sun. Saturn is strong and will bring trouble," he announces. (Chand 11) A complex narrative of diaspora, nation, and identity evolved in *House of the Sun*, as the Hathiramani indeed faced a series of problems, some comic and some tragic, which pulled in their ambit other Sindhi families who migrated to India after Partition in 1947 and relocated to other countries following a chain of migrations. Through the portrayal of two generations of

expatriate Sindhis, Meira Chand undertakes a journey through the mazes of Sindhi nationalism to the construction of subjectivity beyond the nation. As Arjun Appadurai pointed out, "[f]or those of who grew up male in the elite sectors of the postcolonial world, nationalism was our common sense and the principal justification for our ambitions, our strategies, and our sense of moral well-being". (Appadurai 158)

As Saturn moves out of the house of the Sun, the Sindhi families of Sadhbela witnessed a dowry killing, a crisis which brought them closer. Mr. Hathiramani had a cerebral attack while translating Shah Abdul Latif's *Song of the Neck lace*. During his stay in a nursing home, his wife burnt his library and his diary. Like Don Quixote he was abruptly made to leave his grandiose and absurd project. Standing in the empty room he tried to make sense of that violence, and in a flash of sudden realization he saw the absurdity of his nationalist scheme of asserting an essential Sindhi identity by excavating instances of past glory:

Latif had not been what was needed ...the world called instead,
he saw suddenly, for *The Hathiramani*
Newsletter. Spread about the world were community
after community of expatriate Sindhis, who knew
little of their culture. It was his duty to speak to them.
His heart beat violently. The purpose of the fire was
clear to him now...the newsletter would go to

communities in Hong Kong, London, New York,
Madrid, Lagos ...destinations flew through his mind,
In these places were settled Sindhis for whom his
newsletter would reinstate identity. (Chand 310)

There is no doubt that all the residents in Sadhbela were from Sukkur or Rohri, the towns they lived in there were from either side of a bridge across the Indus River. All those residents were Hindu refugees at the time of partition and all had fled from Sind. Their land laid to the north- west of what was once called India and these times it is known as Pakistan. The people of Sukkur were well known to display their superior wealth extravagantly; they rode about in ostentatious horse drawn carriages. While as the people of Rohri, were engaged with thrift and rickshaws, and they swore to their pure hearts and resident saints, their hospitality and their food as well. In those far off days before all, they became refugees, fled from a Muslim Sind, each town scorned the other. History, poverty and chaos very soon changed those parochial ways.

The title of the novel entitled as *House of the Sun* has got a significant importance. Many religious persons including Mrs. Hathiramani were very anxious regarding it. Mrs. Hathiramani was restless and visited many persons in order to know the things in detail. As she was an illiterate woman she always thought it as a bad omen which from her perception would destroy her home. After visiting Bhai Sahib and Mr. Bhagwandas she made her way towards Lokumal Devnani, who was called as Dada because of his age and wisdom. Mrs. Hathiramani was suggested by Lokumal Devnani,

not to be superstitious because in the Gita it is written that, “The man who is ignorant, who has no faith, who is of a doubting nature, perishes. For the doubting soul there is neither this world nor the world beyond nor any happiness”. (Chand 44)

One of the prominent characters of the novel, Mr. Hathiramani, was an ex-journalist who comically failed to re-create the glorious literary tradition of Sindh in translation. He stands out among his lowbrow and business-like brethren as a nice example of Anderson's bourgeois nationalist who can mobilize large reading publics in imagined communities, “exploiting cheap popular editions”. (Anderson 40) As the astrological crisis blows over, his ideological position of a classic nineteenth-century bourgeois nationalist shifts towards a post-national perspective of a globalised era. Meira Chand represented, the nationalist's disillusionment, thus deconstructing the idea of an essential Sindhi identity and writing a genealogy of Sindhihood.

There are many prominent characters who sustain the culture of Sindh while living in Mumbai and Mr. Hathiramani was predominate among them. He did the work of protagonist and kept alive the culture, tradition, custom and other rituals of Sind. We notice his attempt to pass on his proposed work for the younger generation through his writing. In his diary, there is everything written which distinguished the Sindh from Mumbai in every aspect and respect. Like a model, he represents the whole community of Sindhis. Unfortunately, he was fed up from his illiterate wife who was superstitious from his perception. All her activities reflect her ignorance which embarrass him. She thought that the family of Mrs. Murjani had kept an evil eye on her family. She only believed in

beliefs like a traditional woman. Her husband, on the other hand, always learnt and advised her not to be superstitious but believe in reality that is what life is all about. But she did not heed and carry on with her own thoughts. She had worn a sapphire which was given to her by Bhai Sahib in order to protect her family from Saturn. She remained ignorant through out the story and her views regarding education were to quote her husband as the best example whom she thought was polluted by it. She rebuked her servant, Raju not to get engrossed towards education as it only destroys. She thought, her husband was ruined by education and she did not want the same should happen with her servant. She suggested him to spend his life in other pursuits.

There are many issues which have been focused by Meira Chand. Her dexterity is worthy appreciating. She has dealt with every minor issue in such a way that a person can not resist himself from appreciating her. She has not demonstrated issues what other writers like Shobha De and Namita Gokhale depict in their vulgar ways. So, one should be thankful to her, for keeping herself as an exception. Her dexterity has given her characters a realistic touch. Refugees while migrating from Sindh to Mumbai felt nostalgic and this diasporic element has been nicely presented by her. No doubt, refugees lived a beautiful life in Mumbai, but still they missed their beautiful moments which they had spent in Sindh. Their life in Sindh was a sort of ecstasy for them.

To sum up, It may be said that Meira Chand, has magnificently depicted a portrayal of tough times of the Sindhi community. After getting married, she came to know from her husband the difficulties Sindhis had faced during the partition. Keeping

all that in view, she wrote this novel and her dexterity has made it remarkable for the whole Sindhi community. She has depicted a real picture of miserable persons during the chaotic times of partition. This Sindhi had been mentioned in her biography and with her dexterity she has delineated it in *House of the Sun*. She is undoubtedly a great writer of diasporic literature. Before writing this work, she had written four novels which depict abroad but this work had given her an opportunity to put her views regarding one of the best cities of India and she had presented it in a realistic manner. She has confessed that she herself was an outsider while living away from her home in all perspectives and through her characters she has depicted the same feeling. Like Jane Austen, she remains confined to her inch of ivory. She does not mix her characters with other communities living in Mumbai. There is neither a Maratha or a Gujrati, Parsi living in Mumbai. She does not depict Shivsenas ire against non – Maharashtrians living in Mumbai.

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