

Between Tradition & Desire: Analysing Identity in *Inside the Haveli* & *Madame Bovary***Khyati Kapoor**

M.A. English (Prev.)

St. Xavier's College Jaipur

Abstract

Cultural narratives play an important position in shaping individual and collective identities, influencing how humans understand themselves and their position inside society. This paper explores the complicated courting among cultural narratives and identity via the lens of two extensive novels: *Inside the Haveli* by Rama Mehta and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. Both texts delve into the lives of ladies confined in societal expectations, revealing how those cultural narratives form private identities and futures. *Inside the Haveli* affords Geeta's war against the orthodox culture of Udaipur, highlighting her efforts to carve out a course for herself and different women in her network. Conversely, *Madame Bovary* highlights the clash between individual goals and societal norms, showcasing Emma Bovary's pursuit of fulfillment and its tragic results. By exploring the protagonists' trips, this examine underscores the importance of cultural narratives in shaping identity and the ability for resistance against oppressive structures and the tension between conformity and self-declaration, illuminating the challenges ladies face within their respective cultural contexts. Ultimately, this exploration contributes to a broader information of how narratives tell human values and the quest for identity.

Keywords: *Inside the Haveli*, *Madame Bovary*, Identity, Culture, Society

Introduction

Cultural stories influence the way people see themselves and their position in society. Literature has always been a vehicle for building and breaking these stories, especially with regard to gender identity. Cultural stories are the tales, customs, and assumptions that create the fabric of society, giving everyone a common identity and influencing behavior. These stories—grounded in history, social convention, and shared values—determine what is "acceptable" within a culture and frequently dictate gendered, familial, and class-based roles. Though they provide a sense of belonging and continuity, cultural stories can also trap people, forming their sense of self by defining limits on the way they are to live and what they are to strive for.

The effect of these stories on identity is significant, as they shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their role in the world. Those who conform to societal norms tend to find stability in these roles, but those who attempt to break from them face resistance and internal conflict. In literature, this conflict becomes particularly evident, as characters try to reconcile personal wants with the demands made of them by their culture.

Academics like Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, and Judith Butler offer critical tools to analyze how cultural identity is constructed, questioned, and reconstructed in literary works. Hall (1990) believes that cultural identity is not a fixed category but a constant process of becoming and is shaped by historical and social discourses. His identity theory of "positional" over static also holds true for Geeta's evolution in *Inside the Haveli*, where she evolves from a resistant outsider to a woman finding agency in the patriarchal traditions. Geeta's identity is not fixed, changing according to the cultural expectations of the haveli and yet retaining the essence of the previous self. *Emma Bovary*, on the other hand, in *Madame Bovary* has this adaptability to contend with;

her idealized conception of self, drawn from literature and society, keeps her from negotiating her aspirations against the strictures of her reality.

Homi K. Bhabha's "third space" (1994) idea is also relevant to Geeta's journey. The third space is a location of hybridity in which new identities are forged from cultural exchange so that there is resistance and transformation. Geeta is this hybridity as she mediates modernity and the traditions of Udaipur, transforming the haveli from the inside out instead of dismissing it outright. This is in contrast to Emma, who does not have a third space—she envisions only two poles: compliance with societal expectations or total transcendence through passion and consumerism. Her failure to move between these divergent forces contributes to her demise. Likewise, feminist critics like Simone de Beauvoir and Sandra Gilbert analyze how texts construct and narrow down female subjectivity. For Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), women are formed by a set of expected roles and not by an underlying essence, one that is immediately evident in the existential discontentment of Emma. She cannot present herself beyond male observation and fantasies she internalizes, which sets her up to become increasingly disenchanted. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) carry this thesis further in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, with the implication that women in literature are stuck in the binary categories of either angel or monster. Emma, for resisting the traditional expectations, is the latter—to be shunned and ultimately condemned.

Postcolonial feminist critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak add to this analysis by examining the overlap of gender and cultural hegemony. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak criticizes the way that women's voices, especially from colonized or traditional cultures, are silenced or mediated through powerful narratives. Geeta's voice, though audible in the haveli, is

still trapped in the home, and the question is whether or not authentic freedom can exist within patriarchal frameworks. Even in her acts of reform, she works within the parameters defined by tradition. Emma, however, tries to escape completely, but her voice is silenced through her own tragic death, upholding the restrictions placed on women who defy expectations. Both novels, although they take place in widely disparate cultures, demonstrate the difficulty of navigating identity within strict social structures.

These views illustrate that cultural identity and gender roles in literature are not only reflective but also performative, influencing societal understanding and individual self-perceptions. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) proposes that identity is constantly being constructed through repeated social acts. Emma's wish to become the characters she reads about in books—romantic heroine, passionate lover, aristocratic woman—demonstrates how gender identity is not only imposed but also internalized through cultural narratives. Geeta, on the other hand, enacts her role in the haveli but quietly reconfigures it over time, demonstrating that agency can be present even within power structures. These works, thus, call for an in-depth analysis of how women negotiate the cultural roles placed upon them and how literature reflects and challenges these roles.

But identity is constructed not only through cultural expectations but also through physical spaces of inclusion or exclusion. Space is not merely a backdrop in literature; it plays an active role in constructing characters' consciousness and ambition. "Space is not a passive container, but a means through which social relations are produced and reproduced" (Lefebvre 26). In the framework of these novels, the dichotomy between secluded, conventional space and the presumed liberty of the city plays a significant part in determining the ideals and constraints of

both Geeta and Emma.

In *Inside the Haveli*, the eponymous haveli is simultaneously a space of enclosure and of transmutation, as Geeta quietly remakes herself over time within its confines. Gaston Bachelard's spatial theory, specifically his notion of the "poetics of space" (*The Poetics of Space*, 1958), is useful in defining the haveli beyond its status as a domestic space—it is a place of memory, of control, and of negotiation where individual and collective histories meet. While Udaipur, in its ancient majesty and its changing modernity, is a city in transition—reflecting Geeta's own balancing act between tradition and transformation.

In *Madame Bovary*, space is not used in the same way. The rural landscape, to which Emma is confined, is equated with stagnation and repression, whereas the city—most obviously Paris—is equated with inaccessible desire. Edward Soja's idea of Thirdspace (*Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 1996) is helpful in seeing how the city works for Emma—not as a material reality but as an imagined, projected space that stimulates her discontentment. Emma's yearning for city chic frames her identity around fantasy rather than experience, serving to strengthen the novel's argument against romantic idealism and upward mobility.

Analyzing both cultural narratives and spatial aspects of identity, this essay examines how Geeta and Emma's crises demonstrate the intermingling of gender, tradition, and body space. While Geeta adapts to redefining her role in her provided environment, Emma's failure to balance her identity with the environment causes her collapse. In this comparative study, the paper will shed light on how literature still mirrors the processes through which identity is built, questioned, and

redefined by both cultural heritage and the environments it occupies.

Analysis

This essay examines the impact of cultural narratives on identity through a comparative analysis of Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Through an analysis of the lives of their protagonists, Geeta and Emma Bovary, the research points out how societal expectations, based on cultural norms, influence their identities and choices. Whereas Geeta works her way through the orthodox customs of Udaipur, seeking equilibrium and transformation, Emma battles against the restrictions of society in her quest for self-fulfillment, and the story ends in tragedy. This essay contends that both novels shed light on the conflict between conformity and individuality, highlighting the power of cultural narratives to determine identity and the cost of opposing them. Located in the colorful but highly traditional city of Udaipur, *Inside the Haveli* by Rama Mehta is a deep examination of the cultural and social norms of a patriarchal society.

The haveli, which is a classic Indian mansion, is not just a physical context but also symbolic of enclosure, hierarchy, and the burden of tradition. Inside its walls, women generations have lived in strict traditions, lives that are ruled by regulation with the priorities of family honor and society at large ahead of personal choice. Udaipur's profoundly orthodox culture is evidenced in the microcosm of the haveli, where women must continue tradition by fulfilling their roles as obedient wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law. The purdah system of limiting women's mobility and contact with the world outside also becomes an integral part of this culture, pointing to the isolation and restriction placed on them. Nevertheless, the haveli is not entirely a place of

oppression either—it is also a place of familial ties, continuity, and belonging, though in a closely controlled one. By the character of Geeta, an educated woman from Bombay who gets married into this traditional family, Rama Mehta juxtaposes modernity with tradition.

Geeta's path from resistance to slow acceptance and change mirrors the complexities of living in a space that both constrains and nurtures. The honor, ritual, and gender roles of the Udaipur culture influence not only Geeta's identity but also her decisions as she struggles to balance her individuality with the expectations of her new life within the haveli. Geeta's experience in Inside the Haveli is one of transformation, strength, and reconciliation.

As a Bombay educated woman, Geeta enters into the haveli—a deeply orthodox world of traditions—upon her marriage "The haveli was not merely a house; it was an inheritance, a world shaped by centuries of tradition" (Mehta 112). This relates to Lefebvre's concept of space as being socially produced and demonstrates how the haveli is not a mere background setting but an effective force that contributes to shaping Geeta's identity. First, she chokes under the strict tradition and hierarchical system that dictate life at the haveli. The purdah system, the unspoken obedience, and the incessant preoccupation with family honor all cut sharply against the freedom and cosmopolitanism of her childhood. Geeta's resistance to haveli ways is seen from early on trying to fit in "I have come here as a bride, but I will never become a prisoner of these walls" (Mehta 27). Here Geeta shows her resistivity towards the patriarchal roles defined for her to fulfill in aristocratic Udaipur society. She resists the need for the practice of purdah and the rules confining the female to inner household life. Yet as the years go by, Geeta comes to realize the complexities of this old space. She shifts her perception as she is drawn deeper into the lives of

the women in her circle, coming to appreciate their quiet suffering and small attempts at power in the limitations of their positions. Far from turning her back on the haveli, Geeta tries to mediate between tradition and reform. She leverages her schooling and uniqueness to quietly defy conventions, promoting girls' education and encouraging a state of empowerment in the confines of her world. Choosing to play the role given to her at the haveli is neither submission nor accommodation but a self-willed one to introduce subtle reform from the inside out. Geeta's trajectory is then finally an ode to the delicacy of figuring identity in the context of patriarchy. As she comes to accept the cultural stories that inform her new existence, she also creates space for the self, embodying the possibility for change in even the most set forms. "The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the daydreamer, the house lets one dream in peace" (Bachelard 6).

In Inside the Haveli, Geeta's identity is deeply entangled in cultural demands of her new existence in the haveli. As an educated city-bred woman, her own sense of self first conflicts with the strict social roles assigned to her. The haveli is a site of both identity construction and resistance, compelling Geeta to negotiate the thin margin between conformity and self-definition. Resistance is a persistent theme in Geeta's life. Her early resistance to embracing the haveli customs illustrates her inability to maintain her individuality under suffocating social pressure. The purdah system, strict tradition following, and the patriarchal expectations that govern every facet of a woman's existence in the haveli remind her constantly of the cultural values she is supposed to uphold. Geeta resists these constraints by questioning their relevance, especially as they limit her freedom and autonomy. However, her resistance is not overt rebellion but a subtler, more pragmatic approach to challenging the status quo. Over time, Geeta begins to redefine her

identity within the confines of tradition, finding ways to introduce reform without disrupting the delicate balance of the haveli's customs. Her promotion of women's education and her mediatory role as a bridge between tradition and modernity represent her subtle rebellion and her attempt to empower others with harmony.

Geeta's identity journey and resistance demonstrate the rich intersection between cultural narratives and individuality. As she learns to respect haveli traditions, she regains her agency as well, demonstrating that resistance does not necessarily involve rejection but can happen through transformation and adaptation.

The other novel, this time in the 19th-century provincial French setting of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, also represents a society hardwired with tradition, social class, and strict social role expectations. Here, too, the small town is not a mere background, but an almost overwhelming force for the characters in their lives, especially Emma Bovary whose aspirations for adventure and luxury run so strongly at odds with her mundane and second-rate world.

Provincial life in the novel is marked by conformity culture, with societal norms determining all aspects of life, including marriage and morality. Emma's marriage to Charles Bovary, a humble and well-intentioned country physician, reflects the conventional roles of a woman—to be a faithful wife and caregiver, happy with a life of domesticity. But Emma is suffocated by the dullness of this life and the relentless expectation to live up to ideals of femininity that do not allow for personal ambition or desires. The social mores of 19th-century France valued enormously propriety and reputation, especially for women. Emma's desire for adventure and romance, stimulated by the romantic novels she reads, runs directly counter to these

expectations. Her efforts to break free of the constraints of her reality—by having affairs and wasting money—indicate her defiance of the societal structures repressing individuality and promoting conformity. These efforts, however, are what cause her downfall, since the strict moral code of her society does not allow much room for deviation, particularly by females.

The setting and social conventions of provincial France are used by Flaubert to satirize the social oppressive structures of his era. Emma's tragic destiny highlights the price of challenging these conventions and the intense loneliness experienced by those who venture to challenge the established order. Emma Bovary's existence in *Madame Bovary* is characterized by an inner struggle between her idealistic notions of life, love, and happiness and the brutal reality of her reality. Brought up on a diet of sentimental fiction, Emma forms unrealistic ideals of life, love, and happiness. She imagines an ardent and decadent existence, full of expansive gestures and fiery passion, but she is stuck in the humdrum routine of provincial France, wedded to Charles Bovary, whose plainness and averageness contrast so vividly with her visions. Emma's discontent with her existence generates an intense feeling of estrangement. On the other, she longs for freedom, adventure, and self-satisfaction, wanting to break free from the shackles of her mundane marriage and the repressive social conventions that circumscribe her identity as wife and mother. "Before she married, she believed that she had loved; but since the happiness which ought to have ensued upon that love had not arrived, she must have been deceived" (Flaubert 45). In contrast, her efforts to seek this idealized existence—through adulteries with Rodolphe and Léon, and her profligate financial actions—only add to her disillusionment and more deeply entangle her in a cycle of desperation. This desire versus duty struggle is the very core of Emma's character.

Her vehement pursuit of romance ideals frequently finds her dismissing the duties of domestic life, breeding a divide both between herself and Charles and herself and the conventions of the world she lives within. Her inability to bring peace to these dichotomous forces—her desire for a never-achieved ideal and the demands placed upon her from her reality—is what ultimately sends her tumbling. Emma's struggle is both intensely personal and universally relatable, a reflection of the struggles of those who defy societal norms in pursuit of their passions. In her tragic trajectory, Flaubert critiques the inflexibility of social systems and the perils of impossible romanticism, and Emma's tale becomes a timeless exploration of identity and resistance. Emma Bovary's resistance to social expectations in *Madame Bovary* is paid for with catastrophic costs, both revealing the repressive systems of provincial France in the 19th century and the subjective cost of violating them. Her constant pursuit of passion, extravagance, and personal freedom, at odds with her assigned role as faithful wife and mother, leads her down a road of self-destruction. Emma's affairs outside of marriage and reckless spending are her main acts of rebellion against a life she perceives as claustrophobic. Though these actions briefly create for her an illusion of fulfillment and freedom, they eventually contribute to her emotional, social, and monetary devastation. Her relationships with Rodolphe and Léon, which she at first sees as means of escape from the drudgery of her everyday existence, are eventually superficial and unsatisfying and leave her even more lonely and disillusioned. Financially, Emma's wanton pursuit of materialism propels her and Charles into unmanageable debt. Her failure to cope with the practical realities of her desires demonstrates the price of her rebellion. As the debts mount and creditors start to close in, the tenuous veneer of her existence is shattered, revealing her desperation and vulnerability. The final price of Emma's rebellion is her tragic death. Dismayed

by her failures, betrayed by the men she trusted, and having no way out, Emma kills herself by ingesting arsenic. Her suicide is a shivery condemnation of a society that condemns women who stray from scripted roles and never forgives nor redeems their sins.

Through Emma's destiny, Flaubert condemns the strict moral standards of the period and double standards that permit men more latitude while condemning women for the same desires. The tale of Emma is a warning of the dangers of rebellion in a society resistant to change or individuality.

"We must be insistently aware that space can be both real and imagined, both material and metaphorical" (Soja 11).

Both *Inside the Haveli* by Rama Mehta and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert are concerned with the deep influence of social norms on women's lives, particularly their identity and autonomy issues. Even though both novels are placed in entirely different cultural and geographical settings—19th-century provincial France and the orthodox haveli culture of Udaipur, India—the two novels highlight how patriarchal systems enclose women into predetermined roles, with little scope for personal ambition or desire. In both novels, the protagonists, Emma and Geeta, are confronted with a dilemma between societal norms and their own aspirations. Geeta, although initially foreign to haveli life, eventually conforms to its traditions by finding means of balancing her self with the obligations of being a wife and mother. On the other hand, Emma freely defies the shackles of provincial life, embracing her romantic and material ambitions as a means to escape the harsh realities of her existence. In their different strategies, however, both women wrestle with conformity versus self-expression. Another similarity lies in the exploration of the roles women are expected to play. Geeta and Emma are

both defined by their positions within the family—the dutiful wife in *Inside the Haveli* and the idealized domestic figure in *Madame Bovary*. These roles, shaped by societal norms, dictate their behavior and limit their agency. Both novels critique these expectations, illustrating the emotional and psychological toll they take on women.

Finally, both texts focus on the impact of surviving such social constructs. While Geeta is able to find her identity within the borders of the haveli, Emma's revolt results in tragic defeat. Such endings, starkly contrasted as they are, demonstrate the universality of women's plight in patriarchal cultures, foregrounding the across-the-board search for identity and independence in a global context. While both *Inside the Haveli* by Rama Mehta and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert have thematic correspondences in portraying women's woes of identity crisis and societal expectation, their solutions and methods diverge considerably depending on cultural, historical, and narrative contexts.

One of them is the divergence in the response of the protagonists to societal restraint. Geeta, in *Inside the Haveli*, comes to accept the ways of the new life in Udaipur over time, adapting her education and principles to quietly transform the orthodox haveli culture. Her path is one of integration and balance, as she attempts to elevate the women in her life while adhering to cultural convention. Emma in *Madame Bovary*, on the other hand, openly dismisses the societal conventions that trap her. Her quest for passion and luxury is characterized by blatant defiance, as she defies the norms of wife and mother. Where Geeta follows a process of incremental change, Emma embarks on rebellion, with results that are far more extreme. "She was not strong enough to keep on fighting against the waves of a sea that had drowned her" (Flaubert 321). This

figuratively depicts Emma's failure—whereas Geeta manages to balance desire and reality, Emma meets a tragic fate.

The novels are also different in how they describe cultural environments. Inside the Haveli is set firmly in Rajasthan traditions, where the shared identity of the haveli and the larger community is central. Geeta's narrative echoes the significance of kinship bonds, heritage, and communal membership in Indian culture. In contrast, *Madame Bovary* traces the individualistic conflict of its heroine in a Western setting. Emma's narrative is more inner-directed, with an eye to her own desires and isolation, and less to collective identity or cultural roots.

The other difference lies in the resolution of their conflicts. The conflict of Geeta comes to an end on a positive note, as she achieves a balance between her individuality and duty, representing the possibility of transformation within traditional frameworks. Emma's tale, on the other hand, is one of tragedy, her dogged pursuit of impossible ideals resulting in her death. These opposing conclusions demonstrate the authors' views of the potential for women in their own societies—Mehta proposes reform and strength, while Flaubert presents a pessimistic criticism of societal conservatism and romantic idealism. "Change does not mean destruction. I must carry forward what is good and discard what is not" (Mehta 180). This illustrates Geeta's negotiation of identity—she does not eschew tradition per se, as Emma Bovary does, but reconfigures it in her own terms. These variations point to the distinct cultural and philosophical frames of reference through which the two novels consider the interaction between identity, gender, and social norms. They offer together a rich and complex consideration of women's lives in different historical and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, Inside the Haveli and Madame Bovary both portray women struggling against the constraints of society, but with differing methods of identity construction, resistance, and final destiny owing to their respective cultural backgrounds. While Geeta's conflict lies within the strict traditions of Udaipur's aristocratic haveli society, Emma's conflict stems from the stifling bourgeois expectations of 19th-century France. In spite of these variations, both characters are representative of women navigating cultural narratives, so their experiences are universal across their own settings. One significant difference between Emma and Geeta is how their resistance plays out within patriarchal systems. Geeta, a contemporary educated woman, first resists the enclosure of the haveli, but her resistance is not complete; instead, she gradually transforms her environment but still works within the system. Her change is in keeping with Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, when identities form at the threshold of tradition and modernity. Rather than refusing the haveli altogether, Geeta creates a space for agency, demonstrating that cultural negotiation can bring small but effective changes. Emma's resistance, by contrast, is driven by individual want rather than ideological shift. She pursues satisfaction in materialism, romance, and escapism, exemplifying Simone de Beauvoir's "myth of the eternal feminine," in which women are socialized to pursue idealized roles that end up ensnaring them. Emma's failure to negotiate her identity within societal frameworks results in her tragic demise, affirming the severe repercussions for women who do not conform.

A key similarity, however, lies in how both women's identities are shaped by external influences rather than intrinsic self-awareness. Geeta's identity is initially defined by her Westernized upbringing and later redefined by the traditions of the haveli. Her transformation is a result of her environment, much like Emma, whose sense of self is shaped by the romanticized ideals she

consumes through literature. This is in line with Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, which posits that identity is not an innate but a constructed aspect through repetitive social acts "Identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25). The two women are essentially enacting the roles thrust upon them—Geeta as daughter-in-law of the haveli and Emma as bourgeois wife in pursuit of an impossible fantasy. Yet whereas Geeta comes to terms and strikes a compromise, Emma refuses to adjust her ideals to accommodate reality and ultimately destroys herself. The second most important difference between the two stories is the way they handle women's autonomy and agency. Inside the Haveli, Geeta's transformation, though informed by cultural values, remains one of self-realization in which she makes deliberate choices that help her as well as the women around her. Her agency is circumscribed but not completely refused, as she reshapes tradition instead of yielding to it. Conversely, Emma's efforts at autonomy—via affairs, financial autonomy, and emotional defiance—are finally punished, reinforcing the strict moral code of 19th-century France. Her tale illustrates what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar characterize in *The Madwoman in the Attic* as the inescapable destiny of literary women who will not conform: madness, exile, or death.

Though their trajectories differ, both novels underscore how the identities of women are thoroughly bound up in the cultural stories that construct their places. Geeta discovers empowerment in the boundaries of tradition, while Emma cannot build an identity capable of carrying her through in a limiting culture. Their struggles bring to light the timeless struggle of women fighting individual wants against social expectations—a conflict that remains formative of feminist thought and literary fiction today.

Contemporary Relevance

The issues discussed in *Inside the Haveli* and *Madame Bovary* remain relevant in today's society, especially in the way cultural narratives influence gender roles and individual identity. Although these novels were composed in widely disparate historical and geographical settings, Geeta's and Emma's struggles represent a universal conflict between societal expectations and personal agency—a conflict that remains present in the modern world. In modern media, especially in movies, books, and online storytelling, we observe changing depictions of women experiencing identity crises within patriarchal and cultural narratives. Perhaps the most important means through which cultural narratives continue to influence identity today is through the emergence of OTT (Over-the-Top) platforms, where stories are no longer limited by conventional publishing and broadcasting conventions. Digital narrative has made possible more complex and varied depictions of female agency, going beyond the stereotypical representation of women as either docile or transgressive. In series such as *Made in Heaven* and *Bombay Begums*, for example, women protagonists confront the same contradictions that Geeta and Emma do—balancing individual wants while being formed by culture. Likewise, movies such as *The Great Indian Kitchen* critique the deep-rooted patriarchal demands on women in traditional homes, much like the strict hierarchies of the haveli in Rama Mehta's novel. These contemporary stories bring out how cultural customs still affect identity, but they also depict a change—where women are increasingly shown to reclaim their voices instead of being overcome by societal expectations.

Furthermore, social media has revolutionized the performance and understanding of gender identity. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory (1990) contends that identity is not inherent

but performed by recurring social acts. This is best illustrated in the age of the internet, where people perform their identities on the internet, wherein cultural stories telling them how they should look (beauty), do a job (profession), and love someone (relationships) shape their performance. Emma Bovary's fixation on romanticized ideal love can be likened to the manner in which social media sustains unrealistic relationship expectations, consequently leading to disillusionment upon failure of reality to meet the artificially created ideals. As Emma internalized the unrealistic romantic ideals derived from books, contemporary audiences are conditioned by Instagram, TikTok, and movies that project certain images of accomplishment and fulfillment. This makes individual identity a negotiation between inner selfhood and outer expectations—a tension both characters struggle with. Additionally, discourses about feminism, agency, and intersectionality have recast the way we read women's stories now. Whereas Geeta's resistance is more internal, operating within the cultural system to bring about change, modern feminist thought tends to argue over whether gradual reform or full-blown rebellion is more effective in deconstructing patriarchal norms. This argument is played out in modern feminist literature and film, where characters either learn to live within traditional structures or reject them outright. Both books remain pertinent in the contemporary world since they underscore the continued negotiation of identity within cultural frameworks. Women in the present day, just like Geeta and Emma, have to balance societal expectations and pursue individual satisfaction. Through literature, cinema, or online storytelling, these stories remain, a reminder that the conflict between tradition and individual choice is far from over. As new cultural narratives are created through international storytelling, the lessons of *Inside the Haveli* and *Madame Bovary* continue to be essential to how identity is constructed, tested, and redefined.

Conclusion

Narratives, whether cultural or city-based, serve as the foundation of human identity, shaping how individuals see themselves and their place in the world. In *Inside the Haveli*, Geeta navigates the rigid traditions of Udaipur, transforming from an outsider into a woman who both respects and reforms the societal norms around her. Conversely, in *Madame Bovary*, Emma's relentless pursuit of an idealized life leads her to resist the norms of her provincial town, only to meet a tragic downfall. These two contrasting journeys reflect the tension between personal identity and societal expectations, a theme that remains deeply relevant today. Both novels demonstrate that narratives are not passive reflections of reality but active forces that construct identity. The haveli in Mehta's novel and the provincial town in Flaubert's work are more than mere settings; they embody entire systems of values, rules, and expectations that dictate the lives of their inhabitants. Whether one assimilates or resists these systems, the narratives of place and culture become inescapable forces that shape destiny. In the contemporary world, these themes persist, particularly in the age of globalization and digital storytelling. The rise of OTT platforms has introduced a new wave of cultural narratives, allowing diverse identities and voices to gain representation. However, just like Geeta and Emma, modern individuals continue to grapple with the conflict between societal norms and personal desires. The stories we consume shape our understanding of selfhood, belonging, and resistance, proving that narratives remain as influential today as they were in the past. Ultimately, the study of *Inside the Haveli* and *Madame Bovary* highlights the universal struggle for autonomy within cultural frameworks. These narratives remind us that identity is a negotiation between tradition and transformation, between past expectations and future possibilities. Whether through literature, cinema, or personal

histories, stories matter—because they are the blueprints of identity itself.

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