

**NEGOTIATING WOMEN'S IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE FEMINIST
STUDY OF *INSIDE THE HAVELI* AND *MAHASHWETA***

Dr. K.Premabharathi

Assistant Professor,A.V.P College of Arts and Science.No, 4 Chettipalayam,
T.N.Poondi,Tiruppur

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Abstract:

Women's identity has been a major concern in Indian English literature, particularly in narratives that explore gender, culture, and social hierarchy. *Inside the Haveli* by Rama Mehta and *Mahashweta* by Sudha Murty present compelling portrayals of women negotiating different patriarchal contexts. Geeta, the protagonist of *Inside the Haveli*, is thrust into a strict Rajput household where tradition governs every aspect of women's lives, requiring her to reconcile her modern education with deeply rooted customs. In contrast, Anupama, the protagonist of *Mahashweta*, confronts the social stigma associated with vitiligo and marital abandonment, ultimately rebuilding her identity through education, employment, and resilience.

The article presents a comparative feminist analysis of these novels to examine how women's identity is constructed and negotiated through the intersecting forces of patriarchy, family, culture, and individual agency. It further explores how the protagonists challenge restrictive gender norms while redefining their sense of self within their respective socio-cultural environments. Although the protagonists employ different forms of resistance, both narratives emphasize education, self-respect, and ethical values as the foundations of women's empowerment. By juxtaposing these texts, the article contributes to the study of Indian English literature and highlights the continuing relevance of feminist literary criticism in understanding the lives and identities of contemporary Indian women.

Keywords: Women's Identity, Feminism, Indian English Literature, Patriarchy, Female Agency, Selfhood, Comparative Literature, Gender Studies, Rama Mehta, Sudha Murty.

Introduction

The representation of women's identity is one of the major concerns of Indian English literature since post- independence. As India underwent rapid social transformation

through urbanization, modernization and increased educational opportunities, the image of women on the page changed as well. Earlier accounts often depicted women in narrow domestic roles, as sacrificing, obedient and virtuous. However, modern women writers soon challenged these images by depicting women who question patriarchal authority, navigate culture, and construct their own identities. Consequently, Indian English fiction is a significant site for exploring gender, culture and power.

In this literary tradition, Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty are prominent figures because their fiction does not reduce the experiences of Indian women to simplistic tales of victimhood or liberation. Instead, both writers depict identity as a gradual and contradictory process developed through family, education, marriage, tradition and resilience. Their protagonists do not merely resist patriarchy; they negotiate it in ways that express the complexity of women's lives in India.

Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* depicts the life of Geeta, an educated young woman from urban Bombay who marries into the aristocratic Rajput family of Udaipur. The haveli is more than a mere residence; it is a social institution with its own hierarchy, gender roles, and inheritance. Geeta experiences practices such as purdah, strict domesticity, and strict codes of female conduct upon entering this world which are vastly different from her upbringing. Yet Mehta does not portray Geeta as a revolutionary wishing to blow up tradition. Instead, she changes through the process of learning, discussion, and moral persuasion. For example, Geeta's education of girls in the household and respectful engagement with the elderly shows how meaningful social change can emerge through negotiation rather than violence. Mehta presents empowerment as a culturally based process which recognizes change and continuity.

Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* provides a counterpoint but complementary view of women's identity. The story revolves around Anupama, a gifted young woman who loses her husband when she is struck by vitiligo. Once a beautiful woman, Anupama faces social rejection and loneliness. Instead of letting these experiences shape her identity, she slowly rebuilds her sense of self through education, career accomplishments, and self-worth. Murty questions the patriarchal belief that a woman's worth is tied to her looks or marital condition. Rather, the novel shows that true empowerment arises from intellectual development, economic self-reliance and emotional independence. Anupama's choice to embrace an independent life instead of seeking approval from her estranged husband represents a clear rejection of patriarchal notions of womanhood.

Though the two novels differ markedly in setting and thematic focus, they both explore the formation of female identity under patriarchal social structures. Geeta navigates restrictive family traditions from within her extended household, while Anupama rebuilds her life outside the bounds of marriage following social exclusion. These differing paths show that women's empowerment cannot be grasped using just one approach to resistance. Instead, both authors show how women redefine themselves through various routes, while staying closely connected to their cultural contexts. This study contends that identity in both novels must be viewed as an ongoing process of negotiation, rather than a static social category. This viewpoint transcends simplistic dichotomies such as tradition versus modernity or submission versus rebellion. It acknowledges that women assert agency in varied ways, shaped by their historical, cultural, and family contexts. Geeta's quiet renovation of the haveli and Anupama's quest for professional autonomy embody distinct yet equally meaningful acts of resistance against patriarchal norms.

To explore these issues, this article employs an interdisciplinary feminist framework that integrates Simone de Beauvoir's notion of woman as "the Other," Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminist critique, and Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective. Together, these perspectives enable a full grasp of how gender identities are shaped by culture, governed by social norms, and creatively reimagined in literary works. Instead of using these theories in a rigid, formulaic way, the study integrates them as supplementary interpretative frameworks to explore how the protagonists negotiate their identities within different socio-cultural settings.

This article aims to advance contemporary feminist literary criticism in three key ways by comparing *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta*. First, it shows that identity is a fluid and changing process influenced by education, family, marriage, and individual choice. Second, it underscores the varied ways women in Indian society respond to patriarchal authority. In conclusion, it contends that both Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty broaden the scope of feminist discourse by offering culturally rooted models of empowerment that emphasize resilience, ethical decision-making, and self-realization in tandem with social change.

Studies on Indian women's writing have repeatedly highlighted that literature serves not just as a mirror to social realities but also as a forceful engagement in discussions about gender, identity, and power. Instead of depicting women as passive recipients of patriarchal systems, Indian women novelists are increasingly portraying female protagonists who challenge inherited norms and carve out spaces of autonomy within rigid social frameworks. As a result, feminist analysis of Indian English fiction has shifted from focusing on women's

oppression to investigating the intricate ways in which women build identity, assert agency, and reshape cultural traditions.

Feminist literary criticism's theoretical foundations have significantly shaped how Indian women's writing is interpreted. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argued that femininity is not a natural biological trait, but rather an identity formed through societal structures influenced by patriarchal ideology. Her notion of woman as "the Other" has allowed critics to analyze how literary texts portray women's marginalization while also uncovering their ability to define themselves. Judith Butler expanded on this idea by asserting that gender is performative rather than inherent, highlighting that femininity is continually constructed through social behaviors, cultural norms, and institutional structures. In postcolonial settings, Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiqued broad, one-size-fits-all claims regarding women's experiences, arguing that gender needs to be analyzed through the lens of culture, history, class, and colonial inheritance. Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective further shifted literary criticism to focus on women's own creative traditions and experiences, prompting scholars to view female-authored texts as unique contributions to literary history.

These theoretical developments have influenced critical responses to Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli*. Most scholars agree that the novel explores the conflict between tradition and modernity through Geeta's experiences, an educated woman navigating life in a conservative Rajput household. Nevertheless, there are differing critical interpretations about the nature of her resistance. Certain scholars contend that Mehta promotes reconciliation between contemporary values and inherited cultural traditions, highlighting adaptation and dialogue as means of empowerment. Some argue that the novel uncovers the quiet ways patriarchal systems control women's lives, implying that Geeta's seeming acceptance also highlights the structural constraints placed on women's autonomy.

Recent scholarly work has broadened this discussion by exploring the symbolic meaning of the haveli as a gendered space. Critics view the haveli not just as a physical home but as a cultural institution in which hierarchy, domestic authority, and gender norms converge to influence women's identities. Geeta's gradual integration into this environment has thus been interpreted not as passive compliance, but as a case of negotiated agency. Her work to educate girls at home and to promote gradual social change shows that significant transformation can arise from consistent engagement with tradition, rather than its complete rejection. These interpretations undermine easy divisions between conformity and resistance by showing that agency frequently functions within, not apart from, established social structures.

Scholarly discussions of Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* similarly center on issues of identity, social discrimination, and empowerment. Critics repeatedly note that the novel questions patriarchal beliefs connecting a woman's value to her appearance and marital status. Anupama's experience of rejection following her diagnosis of vitiligo serves as a sharp critique of societal norms that define women largely by their physical looks and marital standing. Yet the novel extends beyond stories of victimization. Rather, scholars highlight Anupama's evolution driven by education, career success, and emotional strength as proof of Murty's dedication to depicting women as proactive forces for change.

Current studies have added to the emphasis on the ethical aspects of Murty's fiction. Instead of promoting individual liberation in isolation, *Mahashweta* portrays empowerment as a process rooted in dignity, compassion, and intellectual autonomy. Anupama's choice not to return to a marriage that stripped her of her humanity demonstrates an ethical dedication to self-respect not revenge. As a result, critics are increasingly viewing Murty's work as extending feminist discourse beyond issues of legal or economic equality to encompass wider concerns about identity, recognition, and human dignity.

While scholarship on both novels has produced valuable insights, the current literature highlights several significant limitations. Most studies treat *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta* separately, thus missing the fruitful dialogue that arises when the novels are read side by side. Moreover, many analyses favor one theoretical viewpoint, which restricts the possibility of interdisciplinary interpretations that combine existential feminism, gender performativity, postcolonial feminism, and gynocriticism. Consequently, the connections among identity formation, cultural negotiation, and female agency in various social settings have not been adequately investigated. This study overcomes these limitations by situating Rama Mehta's and Sudha Murty's novels within a common comparative framework. Instead of viewing Geeta and Anupama as separate literary characters, the analysis explores how each protagonist navigates patriarchal systems by employing distinct yet equally important methods of self-creation. In doing so, the study advances contemporary feminist criticism by showing that women's identity in Indian English fiction is not static or universally defined, but rather continually reshaped through interactions among culture, education, family, and personal agency.

Research gap

The existing scholarship on *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta* has greatly deepened critical insight into women's experiences in patriarchal Indian society. Research on Rama Mehta's novel has mainly centered on domestic confinement, gender hierarchy, cultural transition, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Similarly, studies on Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* have focused on social stigma, female resilience, self-respect ,

education, and empowerment. Together, these studies recognize both novels as significant additions to Indian feminist literature.

Although these contributions are valuable, several limitations are still apparent in the current scholarship. First, the two novels have typically been studied as separate works, leading to insufficient comparative analysis. While both narratives examine women's identity and agency, scholars have seldom explored how Geeta and Anupama challenge patriarchal structures via different but equally important forms of resistance. As a result, the wider impact of their experiences on feminist literary discourse has not been sufficiently examined.

Second, many current studies depend on just one critical perspective, such as liberal feminism, cultural criticism, or postcolonial analysis. Although these approaches provide valuable insights, they frequently do not account for the complex, multifaceted nature of identity development. Incorporating existential feminism, gender performativity, postcolonial feminism, and gynocriticism offers a more complete framework for analyzing the intricate connections among gender, culture, and agency in the chosen novels.

Third, prior research often focuses on oppression or empowerment as if they are static categories. Such interpretations fail to account for the fluid and evolving nature of identity, which is constantly formed and redefined through social interactions, family dynamics, educational experiences, and individual decisions. Geeta's slow evolution amid the traditional setting of the haveli and Anupama's rebuilding of her identity following social exclusion show that empowerment is not a single occurrence but a continuous process of negotiation.

Ultimately, these novels require reevaluation in the context of current feminist discourse. Contemporary feminist scholarship is increasingly acknowledging negotiation, resilience, adaptation, and self-realization as important modes of resistance, in addition to overt forms of rebellion. A comparative look at *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta* can thus offer a more detailed understanding of women's agency in Indian English literature.

The present study addresses these gaps by undertaking a comparative feminist analysis of the two novels through an integrated theoretical framework. It seeks to demonstrate how women's identity is constructed, contested, and transformed within intersecting structures of patriarchy, culture, family, and social expectation.

Research Objectives

This study aims to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To analyze how women's identity is portrayed in Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* and Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*.
2. To examine how patriarchal institutions shape the lives, decisions, and sense of self of the main characters.
3. To analyze and contrast the approaches Geeta and Anupama used in negotiating cultural expectations, gender roles, and social constraints.
4. To explore how education, marriage, family, and economic independence influence women's agency and sense of self.
5. To analyze the chosen novels using the feminist frameworks of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Elaine Showalter.
6. To assess the impact of Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty on feminist discourse in contemporary Indian English literature.
7. To show how both novels remain pertinent for understanding women's identity as socio-cultural contexts evolve.

Research Questions:

This study aims to address the following questions:

1. How is female identity formed and renegotiated in *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta*?
2. How do patriarchal institutions shape the experiences and sense of self for Geeta and Anupama?
3. In what ways do the main characters react to cultural expectations, household duties, and gender-based discrimination?
4. How do education, marriage, family, and economic independence contribute to either enabling or hindering women's empowerment?
5. In what ways do the chosen feminist theories enhance our understanding of the protagonists' paths to selfhood?
6. What commonalities and distinctions arise in the ways identity formation and resistance are portrayed in the two novels?
7. In what ways do these texts engage with current conversations about gender, agency, and empowerment within Indian English literature?

Importance of the Study

This study is significant because it seeks to address a notable gap in current scholarship by uniting two prominent novels that have rarely been analyzed together within a unified comparative context. Though *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta* originate from distinct social and cultural backgrounds, both texts explore core issues related to women's identity, dignity, and autonomy. Comparing these novels offers a more profound insight into the various ways women navigate patriarchal systems and reshape their identities amid restrictive conditions.

This paper advances feminist literary criticism by showing that women's empowerment cannot be confined to one model of resistance. Geeta's transformation happens through negotiation within traditional family settings, while Anupama's empowerment stems from education, self-reliance and professional independence. By analyzing these contrasting paths, the research broadens current conversations about female agency, moving beyond the oversimplified dichotomy of submission and rebellion.

It also adds to comparative literature by emphasizing the common concerns and unique narrative approaches of Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty. By combining existential feminism, gender performativity, postcolonial feminism, and gynocriticism, the research provides a multidimensional framework for analyzing how identity is formed in Indian women's writing.

Moreover, these findings may offer significant insights for scholars in gender studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial literature, demonstrating how literary works interact with larger social themes including education, marriage, domestic life, social stigma, and cultural change. In a time still characterized by ongoing discussions about gender equality and women's rights, the study reiterates the importance of literary narratives as venues for examining the intricacies of women's lived realities.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses an interdisciplinary feminist framework informed by the theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Elaine Showalter. Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a thorough framework for understanding how women's identities are constructed, how patriarchal power functions, and the potential for female agency in literary works.

Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism, as presented in *The Second Sex* (1949), provides a foundational framework for the study. Beauvoir contends that woman is not inherently created but is instead shaped by cultural practices and patriarchal institutions. Her notion of woman as "the Other" clarifies how women are placed as subordinate to men within social systems. This viewpoint is especially helpful for analyzing the experiences of Geeta and Anupama, both of whom challenge systems that seek to shape their identities through patriarchal norms. Their paths to selfhood may be seen as resistance to externally imposed notions of femininity.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity adds depth to this conversation by questioning the idea that gender is a fixed or innate category. Butler argues that gender is constructed through repeated social performances, which give the appearance of a stable,

unchanging identity. In both novels, female characters are expected to adhere to culturally defined gender roles linked to obedience, domesticity, beauty, and self-sacrifice. The study employs Butler's framework to examine how these roles are performed, negotiated, and sometimes challenged by the protagonists.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminist perspective offers a crucial counterpoint to the tendency of feminist narratives to universalize. Mohanty contends that women's experiences need to be understood through the lens of particular historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Her work highlights the varied experiences of women and opposes the practice of grouping all women into a single, uniform category. This viewpoint is especially useful for grasping the different social spheres portrayed in *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta*, where gender interacts with culture, class, family dynamics, and regional customs.

Elaine Showalter's gynocritical approach emphasizes women's writing as a unique literary tradition that highlights female experiences, voices, and perspectives. Showalter urges critics to analyze how women writers portray female subjectivity and subvert prevailing literary norms.

Her framework provides a valuable lens for understanding how Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty build narratives that highlight women's experiences and propose alternative visions of identity and empowerment.

When considered together, these theoretical perspectives allow for a multidimensional interpretation of the selected novels. Beauvoir reveals how patriarchal systems construct the "other," Butler demonstrates how gender roles are performed, Mohanty places women's experiences in particular cultural settings, and Showalter emphasizes the importance of women's literary voice. Together, their applications offer a strong framework for analyzing the intricate processes through which Geeta and Anupama negotiate identity, agency, and selfhood.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in comparative literary analysis. The research takes an interpretative approach and aims to explore how women's identity is portrayed and negotiated in Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* and Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*.

The main sources for the study are the chosen novels. These texts are analyzed closely to uncover recurring themes, narrative techniques, character evolution, and portrayals of gender relations. Special focus is placed on issues related to identity formation, patriarchy, marriage, domestic life, education, empowerment, and women's agency.

The study also draws on secondary sources such as scholarly books, journal articles, and critical essays focused on feminist literary theory, Indian English literature, and the chosen authors. These sources offer the essential context needed to understand the novels and place them within wider academic discussions.

The research is centrally based on the comparative method. Instead of analyzing the novels separately, the study engages them in conversation to highlight where they align and where they differ. This approach helps foster a more profound comprehension of how various socio-cultural contexts influence women's experiences and their methods of resistance.

The analysis is informed by an integrated feminist framework drawn from the theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Elaine Showalter. These theoretical perspectives act as frameworks for analyzing the connections among gender, culture, identity, and power in the chosen texts.

By employing detailed textual analysis, comparative interpretation, and feminist theory, the study seeks to develop a rich, layered understanding of women's identity as an evolving process influenced by societal limitations and personal autonomy.

Comparative Textual Analysis: Women's Identity

Both *Inside the Haveli* and *Mahashweta* centre on how women's identities are formed and reshaped within patriarchal Indian society. Though Geeta and Anupama come from distinct social, cultural, and economic contexts, both protagonists face societal structures that seek to shape their identities based on conventional gender roles. Their journeys show that identity is not fixed by marriage, family, or social standing, but develops through education, self-awareness, resilience, and personal agency.

Geeta steps into the haveli as a woman educated in an urban setting, her values molded by that environment. Her entry into the traditional Rajput household introduces her to a culture defined by hierarchy, gender segregation, and customs that are not subject to question. At first, she feels emotionally isolated and culturally out of place, as her education and modern perspective stand in sharp contrast to the expectations placed on daughters-in-law in the haveli. Nevertheless, instead of completely rejecting tradition, Geeta gradually finds her place within the family. She wins the confidence of the older generation while subtly promoting progressive concepts, especially concerning women's education. Her identity thus evolves through dialogue, patience, and adaptation instead of direct confrontation.

Anupama's identity takes a contrasting path. In her early years, she is influenced by beauty, education, and the hope of a prosperous marriage. However, once she develops vitiligo, society starts to define her exclusively by her physical appearance. Her husband and

his family abandoned her, showing how patriarchal culture often judges a woman's worth based on her looks and marital standing. Rather than accepting this rejection inwardly, Anupama slowly rebuilds her sense of self through education, work, and emotional autonomy. Her transformation shows that selfhood stems from intellectual and moral strength, not from external approval.

When compared, Geeta's identity is shaped through interaction within traditional frameworks, while Anupama builds a new identity outside those frameworks. Both main characters reject simply accepting patriarchal views of womanhood, but they seek empowerment in distinct ways. Collectively, their experiences indicate that women's identity is fluid, shaped by context, and continually reshaped through everyday life.

Patriarchy

In both novels, patriarchy serves as the dominant social force that influences women's experiences, though its specific expressions vary considerably. In *Inside the Haveli*, patriarchy is established through family traditions, domestic hierarchy, and customs that assign distinct roles based on gender. Women hold respected roles within the household, but their authority is limited to domestic duties and shaped by traditions established by men. The haveli stands as a symbol of a social order in which women are expected to uphold family honor by adhering to traditional customs.

Geeta's experiences show that patriarchal control frequently functions via internalized cultural beliefs rather than direct force. Senior women in the household act as custodians of tradition, upholding norms related to modesty, obedience, and domestic duties. This shows that patriarchal ideology is upheld not just through male authority but also via cultural practices passed down from one generation to the next.

In *Mahashweta*, patriarchy takes on both individual and social dimensions. Anupama's rejection after her diagnosis illustrates how patriarchal norms prioritize female beauty while stripping women of dignity not tied to physical looks. Her abandonment reveals how social acceptance in patriarchal marriage is conditional. Murty thus critiques a social system that regards women mainly for their utility within family frameworks. Both novels show that patriarchy goes beyond male dominance to include wider cultural systems, family customs, and societal norms. Nevertheless, they also show that women are able to negotiate, question, and ultimately reshape these structures through resilience and self-determination.

Marriage and Domesticity

Marriage holds a central role in both novels, but each author portrays it as a space of negotiation rather than assured satisfaction. For Geeta, marriage brings her into a new cultural environment that requires major personal adaptation. At first, domesticity seems

limiting, but she slowly turns the home into a place where compassion, education, and mutual understanding can flourish.

By contrast, Anupama's marriage highlights how relationships built on shallow expectations can easily crumble. Her husband's failure to support her in times of hardship reveals the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal marriage norms. Instead of framing herself in terms of marital failure, Anupama embraces independence, thus questioning traditional beliefs that marriage is the pinnacle of a woman's life.

As a result, both novels reimagine domesticity by prioritizing mutual respect and personal dignity over blind conformity.

Education and Empowerment

Education serves as the most crucial tool for empowerment in both narratives. Geeta uses education to promote slow, incremental social change within the haveli, especially by pushing for greater opportunities for girls. Her education allows her to challenge inherited customs while still respecting cultural values.

In a similar way, Anupama's education serves as the basis for her economic independence and psychological healing. Her professional accomplishments help her rebuild confidence, showing that education grants women both intellectual freedom and practical independence.

Both authors thus depict education not only as academic achievement but as a transformative power that allows women to reshape their identities beyond patriarchal constraints.

Female Agency

The main characters exemplify two different approaches to female agency. Geeta asserts her agency via negotiation, empathy, and incremental change, while Anupama expresses hers through autonomy, self-worth and individual decision-making. Neither model is considered universally better. Rather, the novels recognize that women's reactions to patriarchy differ based on historical and cultural contexts.

Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

Instead of portraying tradition and modernity as opposing forces, both novels show that significant social change arises from the interaction between them. Geeta harmonizes contemporary education with cultural traditions, whereas Anupama adopts modern notions of independence without abandoning ethical principles grounded in Indian society. As a result, both authors suggest a balanced empowerment model rooted in dignity, education, and social responsibility.

The comparative analysis shows that Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty subvert traditional portrayals of Indian womanhood by depicting identity as an evolving process

rather than a static social role. Though Geeta and Anupama employ distinct approaches to resistance, both reject patriarchal notions that confine women to roles as obedient wives, attractive ornaments, or passive family members. Instead, they build identities based on education, moral conviction, and self-respect.

The study further shows that patriarchy functions through both formal institutions and everyday cultural behaviors. Together, family traditions, societal expectations, and beauty norms influence women's experiences. Still, both novels highlight that women can navigate these structures by means of resilience, education, and moral courage. Through a feminist lens, the protagonists embody the processes outlined by Beauvoir, Butler, Mohanty, and Showalter. Their journeys show that gender identities are shaped by society, negotiated through culture, grounded in history, and creatively reimaged through the lived experiences of women.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the portrayal of women's identity in Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* and Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* using a comparative feminist lens. Although the novels differ in their settings and characterizations, both question traditional patriarchal views on gender, marriage, domestic life, and the value of women.

Geeta's change within the traditional haveli and Anupama's rebuilding of her identity following social rejection show two interconnected routes to empowerment. Their experiences show that identity is not fixed at birth nor unchanging, but develops through ongoing interaction between personal goals and societal expectations.

By combining existential feminism, gender performativity, postcolonial feminism, and gynocriticism, the study demonstrates that women's empowerment involves negotiation, resilience, education, and ethical self-realization. These findings confirm once again that the fiction of Rama Mehta and Sudha Murty remains significant in Indian English literature and modern feminist criticism.

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