Chapter 7

*Bai-sa Jaya* of Balmer

*Raj niti* is the very breath of life of *Bai-Sa* (Princess) Jaya of Balmer. She learns the ancient Indian art of governance as a child and it stands her in good stead throughout her tempestuous life. She is deliberately brought up to face the reality of royal life in the changing times. Mehta’s Raj may well be said to have designed the perfect antidote to British imperialism in India in the native philosophy of *Rajniti*.

When Princess *Jaya* of Balmer is five years old, her father, the Maharajah of Balmer, insists that she accompany him into the jungle. The Maharani objects, but the Maharajah overrules her saying that she coddles their children too much. Two hours before dawn the Maharajah rides out with his hunting party, with Jaya before him on his saddle. As they are passing through a village, two shikaris bring news of the sighting of a big panther and suggest that the princess better be not taken along. The Maharajah entrusts Jaya to a group of villagers and mounts his elephant (Mehta, *Raj* 1-2).

A village boy of about ten tempts Jaya to drink cow's milk in the villagers' manner: he makes Jaya squat under a cow, her head pushing against its soft belly while he squeezes the full udder, directing a stream of warm milk into her hair and eyes. Drawn by the delighted hooting of
the watching children, the village women come there and, seeing Jay a
covered in mud and milk, hold their earlobes in mortification, beat the
children and exclaim in fear of what the Maharajah will say. The children
cry and so does Jaya. Nine-year-old Tikka, the Crown Prince of Balmer,
arrives on the scene, winks at the guilty boy and, regarding the crying
Jaya with disgust, takes her into the jungle, where the panther has been
captured and tethered (Mehta, Raj 3).

Riding in a howdah atop an elephant, Jaya is at first excited, but, as
the jungle noises increase, she is frightened and crouches on the floor of
the howdah, gripping her brother's ankles. When they reach the
Maharajah's position, Jaya sees a large black panther, chained to a sal
tree, blood dripping from its neck, filling the jungle with its roars of rage
and leaping against the steel links of the chain. She doses her eyes in
fright. When she opens her eyes she finds herself standing very near the
agitated panther. As the animal lunges, its blood and spittle fall on her
skirt. She tries to hide behind her father's legs but the Maharajah forces
her to face the panther. Gradually Jaya’s terror subsides (Mehta, Raj 3-4).

Mehta comments:

Jaya was too young to understand that Maharajah Jai Singh
was teaching his children Rajniti, the philosophy of
monarchy, as it had been taught to prince after prince of the
House of Balmer. Not until she became a ruler herself did she comprehend that the Maharajah taught his children the traditions of courage when he was himself a frightened man.

(Raj, prologue 5)

In 1897, caravans of bards converge on Balmer across the drought-ridden desert to bless the birth of the firstborn of the Maharajah. Outside the capital they are accommodated in a tent city installed by the Maharajah. Entering the inner fort, they sing the glory of the Rajput race and are rewarded. The thirty-ninth heir to the throne of Balmer is born. Many Indian monarchs are scheduled to go to London for the Diamond Jubilee of Empress Victoria. Many nobles from the several Rajput kingdoms that dot the desert urge Maharajah Jai Singh to go to London and to impress upon the British monarch the sufferings of Indians under British rule (Mehta, Raj 16). The Maharani's words finally persuade the Maharajah to go: “Go to London, Durbar. You are the voice of the people’s assembly. Victoria must listen to you. India's Empress cannot ignore India's suffering” (Mehta, Raj 16). But, in England, Maharajah Jai Singh discovers that no English ear is interested in tales of famine or death in India (Mehta, Raj 19; 26).

By the third year of the drought the Maharani sees that the balance of Baimer's government is being disturbed. The Maharajah's absences are
longer and he complains that the nobles are conniving against him because he is taxing them more to combat the famine. The wives of the nobles call on the Maharani and complain of dwindling dowries and impossible budgets. Growing afraid for her husband, the Maharani, at night, kneads the knots of tension in his body (Mehta, *Raj* 28-29).

Unable to cope with the influx of refugees into Balmer, Maharajah Jai Singh reluctantly closes the borders of Balmer to refugees. However, he adamantly persists in his resistance to a British presence within his country, which, many of his nobles believe, will enrich the country (Mehta, *Raj* 30). The wives of the nobles become openly rebellious and come in a delegation to the Maharani, whom the Prime Minister's wife addresses thus:

‘The Maharajah is unreasonable, hukam. He has not allowed us to take a paisa from the fanners in the last four years, but we have had to pay our taxes just the same. We have not been allowed to charge for irrigation and seeds. We have been forced to open our granaries to feed starving refugees. . . How does the Maharajah expect us to live, hukam? Even the best cow runs out of milk when it is not fed.’ (Mehta, *Raj* 30)

The Maharani realises that the pyramid of Balmer's government is
The Maharani is certain that she is again pregnant. She waits for the return of her husband, thinking of how the ordered world which gave purpose to her existence has turned upside down and of the depth of her husband's despair as his country has become a wasteland ready to be exploited by the machines of a new age without customs or humanity. The Maharajah arrives and asks her to break purdah. After remaining paralysed for some time by the order to destroy a thousand years of tradition, the Maharani begs him to ask anything from her but that (Mehta, Raj 31).

Tearing the veil from her hands, the Maharajah tells her:

‘Savage times require savage measures! Your sacrifice will not be unique. The Tiger Queen of Baroda has come out of purdah and is travelling in her country to assist in famine relief. The Regent of Jodhpur's wife has moved out of Jodhpur's Fort. Now she lives in a mud hut and cooks food for the drought kitchens with her own hands. I require your presence in the camps. Ask yourself this, woman. What is more important, your veil or your people's despair?’ (Mehta, Raj 31-32)

Regaining control, the Maharani sends for the Baran, the senior
maid who performs all her puja when she is menstruating or otherwise indisposed. She instructs her surrogate in the zenana to ensure that during her absence the refugee women are not neglected. The Baran protests that if she breaks purdah the zenana will lose the reason for its existence. But the Maharani silences her by saying that the Maharajah wishes it (Mehta, Raj 32).

The Maharani, for the first time in her life, goes to the King's View, a tower designed to give the ruler a clear view of the surrounding countryside and deny an enemy army the advantage of surprise. She is to dine with the Maharajah there. Arriving, she tells him of the expected child. He says that he may not be present for the birth because he is going to England for the Coronation. It is only an excuse to meet the Tsar and sell him the Balmer Navratan secretly to raise funds since the treasury is nearly empty (Mehta Raj 36-37). In fear, the Maharani says:

If the British ever discover you have broken the terms of your treaty with the Empire and dealt independently with a foreign power, especially Russia.... The British will exile you from Balmer! They will take your throne! They will refuse to recognize Tikka as your heir, or invest him with his rightful ruling powers! You know they can invoke their terrible Doctrine of Lapse.’... (Mehta, Raj 37)
The Maharajah explains the political realities which have cornered him:

‘If the rains fail again, I shall have to construct a railway and allow foreign factories to be built in Balmer. I must arrange loans so the fanners don't have to sell their land to the Angrez companies at unreasonable prices. All this costs money. When the Tsar stayed with me as Tsarevitch, he admired the Balmer Navratan… (Mehta Raj 37)

The Maharani, in great secrecy, helps Jai Singh make his preparations for London, as Mehta describes:

Although the treasury was under the Maharajah's jurisdiction, all contents were described in detail in the treasury files in minute detail. The file that recorded the presence of the Balmer Navratan had to be removed and altered. Night after night the Maharani sat with her husband in the King's View and rewrote the file in her own hand, eliminating any mention of the Balmer Navratan. (Raj 38)

Towards the end of the fifth year of drought the Maharani gives birth to a daughter. This time there are no bards at the gate and no feasts of celebration as at the time of the birth of Tikka. Returning in better spirits from England, Jai Singh hears the voice of his daughter and,
commenting that it is not the sound of a crying baby, but a battle cry, decides to name her Jaya, meaning Victory (Mehta, *Raj* 38-39).

After seven years of famine the rains come. A music performance is held in Balmer Fort to celebrate the occasion. The Maharani re-enters purdah (Mehta, *Raj* 40-42).

From the moment Jaya is born the Maharani is determined to bring her up in the ways of her predecessors, which alone can protect the child from the harsh, changing world beyond the zenana walls. Even as a child, Jaya is made to accompany her mother to the Temple of the Balmer Maharani and recite the names of the sati queens of Balmer (Mehta, *Raj* 42-43). Mehta describes the child’s discomfiture on these occasions:

Jaya squirmed and wondered why there were so many satis and so many vows: no fish to be eaten by the women of the royal house until their desert lands had an abundance of water; no meat to be eaten during the breeding season of animals; no songbirds to be kept in cages until the foreign usurper had left India. (*Raj* 43)

However, she enjoys scattering grain to the birds once the ritual worship is over. She also enjoys the daily ride on horseback outside the walls of the Fort, identifying plants and medicinal herbs and listening to tales of adventure told by the accompanying officers (Mehta, *Raj* 43).
In every other particular the Maharani insists that Jaya be educated in the traditional manner of the princesses of Balmer. Jaya does not like the music lessons of the old Ustad. She is trained in rangoli by the Baran. Once a week she accompanies the Maharani to the chambers below the zenana to dispense the Fort stores. During this long exercise the tvlharani converses with the palace servants about crops or prices so that Jaya will, without knowing it, absorb information about her country (Mehta, Raj 44-45).

Jaya loves the afternoons in Kuki-bai’s chambers, listening to her stories, while a maidservant massages her body with wheat mixture. After a bath she goes to the rifle range to compete with Tikka under the supervision of Major Vir Singh, her father’s ADC. She is not so confident about the riding session, particularly since Major Vir Singh asks her to jump fences without letting the coins between her knees and the horse’s hide drop. However, she does not cry when she falls off her horse because her mother has constantly urged that a Rajput princess has to learn endurance. Then she listens to Major Vir Singh’s stories of his military exploits (Mehta, Raj 45-49).

Kuki-bai dances on the tusks of Moti, a ninety-year-old elephant with four-foot-long tusks and recalls the day on which she and her two
brothers arrived on Moti at the Fortress of Chittore, performed before five Rajput kings and was taken as concubine by the Lion of Balmer, Maharajah Jai Singh's grandfather (Mehta, Raj 49-52).

Jaya is ignorant of the changes occurring in her father's kingdom, like the laying of railway lines or the fitting of organ pipes in the church her father has built for the Angrez. When the Balmer State Train steams into the new railway station on the outskirts of the capital, it is a strange sight for her. So are the first motor cars that arrive in Balmer Fort. At first she refuses to enter one of the cars (Mehta, Raj 53-54).

Jaya hates her cousin's father, Raja Man Singh. He is an Anglophile who has already engaged English rotors for his daughter and his small son John, who is next in line after Tikka to the Balmer throne. His children are known by English names, they eat with knives and forks and they call their parents Mummy and Daddy. One day she overhears her father telling her mother that he must engage an English tutor for Tikka in order to convince the British that he is training his son to be loyal to them since the British and the Russians have overcome their differences and there is a danger of the British discovering his secret dealings with the Russians, which is a crime in their eyes (Mehta, Raj 54-55).

That afternoon the Maharani drives to Chand Mahal, Kuki-bai’s old home, now being altered to accommodate the Englishman hired to
teach Tikka. Jaya is curious to see how the Angrez live. In the bathroom she mistakes the toilet commodes for bath tubs for the feet. On their way back Jaya tells a maid that she doubted if Tikka can be taught anything by people who bathe in dirty water and have stiff legs and so need chairs to relieve themselves (Mehta *Raj* 55-56).

Tikka is fascinated by his tutor, Captain Osborne. In his anxiety to impress his tutor, Tikka applies himself to his lessons with an ardour that surprises his sister. She fears that he is becoming an Angrez. His room fills up with English books and catalogues. Tikka spends all his spare time practising cricket at the nets in the pavilion built at Captain Osborne’s suggestion. Jaya is sick of Tikka’s cricket talk. He is no longer interested in kite-flying but only in England cricket and Ranji, the great Indian cricketer. She fears that Tikka is becoming a half-caste like their cousin John when she finds out that he wants Indians to excel the British.

But when Tikka criticises the Maharajah for refusing to send him to England for his education she says that he hates India because of his tutor. One day she hears Major Vir Singh warning Tikka not to believe everything that his tutor says because that is only his version (Mehta, *Raj* 57-62).

Jaya is not aware of the changes overtaking India, as Mehta describes:
Indian newspapers, freed at last of Viceroy Curzon’s censorship, were filled with passionate editorials demanding Home Rule for British India. Indians were boycotting British goods to show their resentment of the Empire's exploitation of India's resources. Nationalist leaders were being sent into exile. From America, Europe, Africa, Japan the exiled leaders continued to demand representation in the government that ruled their country. Realizing that the momentum of nationalist feeling had become irreversible, the new Viceroy had invited Indians to sit on the Imperial Council which governed British India, and called the first conference ever held between the ICings of India and the representative of the British Crown. (Raj 62)

Before departing for the Viceroy's conference, Jai Singh introduces Jaya to Mrs. Roy, who is to make her fluent in the English language. Jaya has never met an Indian woman like Mrs. Roy. She wears austere homespun saris. She is fiercely anticlerical and refuses to attend the Maharani's religious functions if priests are present. She holds virulent views on the British Raj. She captivates Jaya with bloodcurdling accounts of the injustices of the Empire. She even mentions a cousin shot: dead by the British police. From the cloth satchel hanging from her shoulder, Mrs.
Roy produces an endless supply of nationalist Indian newspapers. Soon Jaya begins to understand Major Vir Singh’s warning to Tikka. For every incident interpreted by Captain Osborne in the imperialist way Mrs. Roy has a contradictory nationalist interpretation. Going to Mrs. Roy's house, Jaya sees many photographs of her husband’s cousin Aran Roy, the brother of the killed nationalist, and learns about his fanatical nationalism. Mrs. Roy tells Jaya that even the maharajahs of India have begun to assert their Indianness to some extent (Mehta, Raj 64-68).

James Osborne, the sixteen-year-old son of Captain Osborne, joins his parents in Balmer. He has been invited to the zenana because Tikka is likely to go to England with him. Jaya learns from Kuki-bai that the new Viceroy has insisted on Tikka being schooled in England if he is to be recognised as Jai Singh’s successor, since the British Raj does not trust the Maharajah after learning of his secret dealings with the Russians during the famine. When James arrives with his mother, the zenana ladies whisper that he will make a good tamer of their little panther Jaya. Kuki-bai rebukes them for their impertinence. Jaya speaks frankly and innocently to James about the house he lives in and its original occupant, the concubine Kuki-bai. James is embarrassed. When she tells him of the original amorous paintings on the walls of the house, James turns red.

When she speaks of them to Mrs. Osborne, the English lady evades the
subject (Mehta, *Raj* 71-74).

Jaya goes to the Osbornes’ accompanied by a maidservant who cautions her that the Angrez do not talk publicly about love and that is why Tikka is angry with her. At the Osbornes’ a cricket match is being played. After the game and refreshments, a film depicting the story of God Krishna is screened. Earlier, when it was screened at the palace, the Maharani and the ladies were excited to sing hymns, but, here, Tikka and his friends mock the film. Jaya is sitting between James and Tikka. James tells Java not to mind Tikka and his friends, since they do not understand what they are seeing. He assures her that he knows about Lord Krishna since he was born in India (Mehta, *Raj* 74-75).

Jaya and James are together a lot. One afternoon Kuki-bai asks her what she now thinks of James and adds that since, at ten, she is half­woman already, it is time she were married. That evening, when she meets James, Jaya is tongue-tied. When James asks if he has offended her, she is overcome with shame and runs into the zenana. The Maharani gives her a parcel—a gift of the portrait of the man she may marry one day. It is a miniature of Prince Pratap, the younger brother of the Maharajah of Sirpur, Maharajah Victor. Jaya feels nauseated and as if her childhood is slipping away. Her mother reassures her that Prince Pratap is quite handsome and the alliance highly desirable. To Jaya Prince Pratap
looks like an animal stalking its prey. Jai Singh arrives and objects to Jaya being shown the picture. He opposes an alliance with Sirpur since the Sirpurs are the lapdogs of the British Empire. He declares that, having been forced to send his son to England, he will not lose his daughter to an Angrez lackey also. Sensing that her childhood is ended, Jaya no longer finds James threatening (Mehta, Raj 76-77).

At the Dasara puja, Maharajah Jai Singh, according to the centuries old custom, sacrifices a white blemishless goat to the family goddess. However, he does not cut off the head of the ram in a single stroke. So the Maharani says that the sacrifice is unholy and predicts that there will be bad luck on the house. The Maharajah too looks worried, perhaps because he knows that the sacrifice was unholy. When the procession returns to the Fort, Jaya races to Tikka and tells him about the Maharani's prediction. But Tikka dismisses the entire ritual as superstitious nonsense irrelevant to the twentieth century (Mehta, Raj 78-80).

Jaya is all excited about the Coronation Durbar in Delhi, which her father and brother are going to attend and she is even jealous of her brother, until Mrs. Roy angrily condemns the whole ceremony as a colossal waste of Indian money in a time of famine. During the absence of the Maharajah and the Heir Apparent, Jaya practises hard with her rifle so that she can bag a tiger when they return and go out on a shikar.
Tikka’s description of the Durbar upon his return excites Jaya until he praises the revelry of the Sirpur princes and wishes that Jaya were older and married to Prince Pratap. The Maharani complains that the Maharajah has been forced to agree to send Tikka to England for his education. Tikka, however, seems quite happy about it (Mehta, *Raj* 80-83).

Jaya goes on a shikar carrying the new rifle that her father brought for her from Delhi. A tiger is sighted. Tikka fires his gun so as to make the tiger move within range of Jaya’s rifle. Jaya fires and wounds the tiger but does not kill it. The wounded tiger prepares to spring on the elephant, which bolts in panic. As the tiger pursues the fleeing elephant, Jaya, filled with shame, drops her gun and seizes James Osborne's waist to steady him, so that he can shoot the tiger. As the tiger, with a mighty roar, makes its death charge, James fires and kills the tiger. As Jaya’s body shakes with fear, James puts his arms around her and holds her until the shivering stops. When she looks up into his blue-green eyes, James congratulates her on bagging her first tiger (Mehta, *Raj* 85-86).

During the shikar, Jaya hears her father rave to Captain Osborne about British injustice, their absorbing Indian armies, their castrating Indian nobles, their confusing Indian scholars, their diminishing Indian priests, their deposing the guardians of Indian laws, leaving only Oriental
despots by smiling on all the vices of Indian rulers except independence. Afterwards she hears her father protesting to Captain Osborne against Tikka being kept out of the cricket team of his British school merely because he is a native of the subject country. Captain Osborne lamely hopes that this experience will teach Tikka to stand on his own feet. The Maharajah says that if England teaches Tikka, as it taught him, to hate injustice in those who are all powerful, he will be content (Mehta, *Raj* 84-85; 87-88).

For some reason that she cannot fathom, Maharajah Jai Singh orders Jaya to learn the texts of *Rajniti*, the classical art of government, which Tikka would have studied if he had not gone to England. Her music and English lessons are curtailed and now she spends most of her time in the Fort Library, looking at portraits of the great astronomer Maharajah Jai Singh of Jaipur, the famous scholar Maharajah Verma of Cochin, Manu the Law Giver, Brighu the Prophet or Shankaracharya the Philosopher. She reads several volumes from the bookshelves. At times the Raj Guru of Balmer questions her on the four arms of kingship, namely, *Saam* (serve), *Daan* (provide), *Dand* (punish) and *Bhed* (intrigue), the duties of a king, his rewards if he fulfils them and on what happens if he does not. He teaches her that the Angrez concept of the divine right of kings does not apply in India where merit and not birth is
the attribute of kingship. He also teaches her the texts on government and *Rajniti* in the *Arthasastra* which provide knowledge of merit (Mehta, *Raj* 88-89).

From the Raj Guru Jaya learns that monarchy is inviolable. But Mrs. Roy lists a number of violations of monarchy so that the position of kings seems precarious. Jaya is confused. She is impressed when Mrs. Roy speaks of the freedom movements in Ireland and India and declares that the British Empire will be finished off by the Home Rule movements in Ireland and India. Jaya’s training in shooting continues under the tutelage of Maj or Vir Singh. The Maharajah plays war games with her, using toy armies on the billiards table (Mehta, *Raj* 89-91). When their talk turns to *Rajniti*, Jai Singh complains:

'Saam, I tended my people, putting their survival above the vanities of an empire, and I was called seditious. *Daan*, I provided for the state, and my only son was taken hostage by the Angrez. *Dand*, how can I be just when I cannot give sanctuary to those who fight injustice in the British Raj or try a man who has the ear of the Angrez? What then remains of monarchy but *bhed*? Intrigue, flattery, imitation—the weakest arm of monarchy. This is what it means to be an Indian king in the British Empire.' (Mehta, *Raj* 91)
Maharajah Jai Singh laments to his daughter over the havoc wrought by the Angrez on Indian monarchs: the Maharana of Udaipur’s days are numbered, since the British have already taken his mint and are trying to gain possession of his mines, despite their treaty with him; the ruler of Manipur has been hanged; the ruler of Rewa has gone; the ruler of Indore lives under a threat; half of Hyderabad's kingdom has been removed on a Viceroy's whim; the Maharajah of Baroda has been threatened, because he turned his back on the Angrez Emperor's coronation and reads books by the Italian republican writer Mazzini; in the south, thrones tremble because their kings dare to be more progressive than the Angrez themselves; and, all over India, rulers are exiled or forced to abdicate while Britain replaces their ancient lines with lackeys. After listing all these depredations of the British, Maharajah Jai Singh asks if the Indian people would ever forgive the Indian monarchs for those ignoble treaties (Mehta, *Raj* 91-92).

Tikka’s letters indicate that he has become an admirer of the Sirpur princes. He reports that Prince Pratap likes French ladies, that he regards Indian women as overfed buffaloes and that he is crazy about the latest craze in dancing, namely the tango. Once Tikka sends a photograph of his birthday party held in the Savoy. It shows James Osborne grown into a handsome young man. Jaya’s heart lurches at the sight of him. James has
always written to her twice a year—a card on her birthday and a letter at Christmas. Jaya is ashamed of her secret passion for him (Mehta, *Raj* 92-93). The Maharani complains about the Maharajah's educational programme for Jaya:

'Who will marry such an overeducated girl? Her in-laws will resent her. Her husband will be insulted when she flaunts her learning in front of him. She is twelve years old. At that age I was already engaged to be married. At the very time she should become a woman, her father is trying to make her into a son.' (Mehta, *Raj* 94)

To repair the damage done by the Raj Guru and the Maharajah, the Maharani decides to undertake Jaya's training herself: She cancels jaya’s pleasant afternoons in Kuki-bai’s chamber, listening to the old concubine’s tales. Instead, Jaya is surrounded by eager purdah ladies teaching her the *sola shringar*, the sixteen arts of being a woman, like maintaining her body's complexion, removing skin down, restoring life to dull hair after childbirth with oils, heightening the body's natural odours with scents to act as an aphrodisiac on the senses of a lover, matching ornaments to clothes, choosing the right auspicious gemstone for each occasion, and, walking gracefully. Jaya feels oppressed by these lessons and eagerly escapes to the cavalry grounds. There, however, Major Vir
Singh makes it quite clear that he is indifferent to the fact that she is a girl, which seems to corroborate the Maharani’s observation that the Maharajah is trying to make her into another son (Mehta, Raj 94-95).

Jaya has only contempt for the old prunes who are teaching her the arts of the female. Her maidservant Chandni, married for six months, says that she can teach Jaya better. She adds that the concubines in the zenana know more about the art of being a woman than the purdah ladies. She offers to take Jaya secretly to meet the concubines. Chandni takes Jaya to the dark chamber below the zenana where the concubines live. The concubines persuade Jaya to shed her clothes and teach her several womanly tricks. Gradually Jaya’s self-consciousness vanishes (Mehta, Raj 95-98).

As war clouds gather over Europe, the Maharajah is worried about Tikka's presence in England and complains that the Viceroy will not allow him to return to India. Captain Osborne assures Jai Singh that Tikka will be quite safe in England. During the English lesson, Mrs. Roy shows Jaya a newspaper which predicts defeat and disillusionment for Britain, because the Muslim sepoys, who in 1857, refused to bite bullets soaked in pig's fat, will now refuse to fight against the Sultan of Turkey. Mrs. Roy points out that the British are assiduously promoting the image of the Aga Khan to subvert the Indian Muslim sepoys. Mrs. Roy decries
the superstitions that Jaya has picked up from the purdah ladies and the concubines (Mehta, *Raj* 99-100).

When Jaya is thirteen years old, the Maharajah agrees that she must be betrothed. The *Maharani* shows her a number of photographs of princes who have been suggested for her. *Kuki-bai* is adversely critical of every one of them, much to the joy of Jaya and to the chagrin of the Maharani. Finally the Maharani challenges Kuki-bai to suggest a bridegroom for Jaya. Kuki-bai says that the Angrez boy James, if he were an Indian, will be her first choice. Jaya blushes at this, much to the concern of the purdah ladies. However, since James is not an Indian, Kuki-bai suggests Prince Pratap of Sirpur as the most eligible bridegroom. Jaya is horrified, but the Maharani hastens to approve of the suggestion. She points out that, considering the Maharajah's poor standing with the British, Sirpur will be the safest family for Jaya to be married into. Jaya goes to the billiards room to plead with her father. Jai Singh tells her that Tikka is returning home. Jaya leaps in joy and wants fireworks and phonograph and records. The Maharajah, however, says that they cannot celebrate Tikka’s return home when five hundred other princes are going to war. When he says that James has already joined his father's regiment and is staying back in England, Jaya is shocked (Mehta, *Raj* 101-03).
The zenana prepares for the manwar ceremony celebrating the warrior caste. For the first time in her life Jaya, now thirteen, is allowed to participate in it. The eunuchs select good pellets of opium to be mixed in asha, the spirit drunk by Rajput warriors, and given to the ladies on this day to make them shed their inhibitions and utter the name of the father of their children. Jaya is so self-conscious about her dress and appearance that she is almost late. The eunuchs serve the asha and the ladies are stoned, while the concubines and the eunuchs sing lewd and erotic songs. As the afternoon fades into dusk, Jaya feels herself in the enfolding embrace of James Osborne (Mehta, Raj 104-09).

While the palace is excited about the anticipated arrival of Tikka, Jaya is worried about James going to war. Upon Tikka's arrival, the war is forgotten for some time in celebration and joy. When Jaya tells Tikka of her mother's decision to marry her to Prince Pratap, he tells her that she need not worry about it because Prince Pratap is not thinking of marriage but of taking the Sirpur Lancers to Europe. At last the telegraph brings news of the declaration of war by England and Japan and the King-Emperor's Mobilization Proclamation. The Maharajah asks Roy and his wife to teach his soldiers the rudiments of the English language so that they can survive in Europe. He asks Major Vir Singh to inform the Senapathy to put all troops on alert and commence full combat training.
Tikka is impatient to join up. Many Indians have already volunteered. Mrs. Roy sneers at them. Tikka and Jaya watch the Balmer Lancers practising manoeuvres every day. They help to teach English to the troops. They listen to the Senapathy’s reports on the progress of the war in Europe. Maharajah Jai Singh notes that the Indian monarchs have mobilised more forces than what is required under their treaty obligations. These forces, collectively known as the Imperial State Forces, are to be commanded by the seventy-year-old Sir Pratap Singh, the Regent King of Jodhpur. He is leaving shortly for Europe with the first contingent. The Balmer Lancers are to leave with the second contingent. Tikka and Jai Singh exchange hot words because Tikka wants to lead the Balmer Lancers (Mehta, Raj 112-13). But Jai Singh makes Ms stand clear: “What honour is there in strengthening those who have made us a subject people, forced to plead for what is ours? I am accepting an intolerable blackmail [i.e. sending the Balmer Lancers] to consolidate your rightful position as heir to the Balmer gaddi” (Mehta, Raj 113).

Frustrated, Tikka takes Jaya to an almost abandoned temple at the far end of the Fort and, in the presence of the Goddess, swears to take the Balmer Lancers to Europe, with or without the Maharajah’s blessings, even joining hands with Raja Man Singh if necessary. However, one
week before the departure of the Balmer Lancers, at a full-dress rehearsal, Maharajah Jai Singh announces that his son will lead the Balmer Lancers into battle (Mehta, Raj 114-17).

On the eve of Tikka's departure to the battlefield, Jaya, as his sister, is to perform a puja. She is heavily decorated with jewels. Dressed in the colour of the Goddess and veiled, Jaya is to receive charge of the sanctity of the Fort when she puts the tilak of blood on Tikka’s forehead. It is very difficult for Jaya and the Maharani to desist from weeping as the preparations are made. Harly next morning Jaya takes her place between the Raj Guru and the Maharajah in the Fort Temple. Taking Tikka's sword from the Raj Guru, Jaya slices the soft cushion of her thumb and smears a long streak of her blood onto Tikka’s forehead. Tikka takes his sword from Jaya and, invoking the Goddess, severs the head of a ram. The priests anoint the foreheads of the Lancers, their weapons and the heads of the horses with the blood of the sacrifice. The Balmer Lancers, led by Tikka, march out to the accompaniment of the Balmer nagara drums and cannon fire (Mehta, Raj 118-21).

As Tikka writes letter after letter from Europe, the Maharani spends entire days in the Temple of the Balmer Maharani doing pujas for the welfare of the Balmer Lancers. Jaya is commissioned to read out to the ladies in the zenana a brief report of the day-to-day developments in
the war. When Tikka goes to the front and his letters cease, the Maharani begins to spend her nights also in the temple in solitary worship. As news of the Maharani’s obsession with the supernatural spreads, mendicants and holy men begin appearing outside the walls of the zenana and the Maharani consults naked, ash-covered ascetics through the stone lattices of the harem walls (Mehta, *Raj* 123-24).

One day the Maharani leaves the Palace with Jaya to consult a woman who lives in a cave at the edge of the desert. She has refused to come to the Palace. She is called Sati Mata. It is said that she is of royal blood and became an ascetic when she was prevented from performing sati at her husband’s death. She lived in Benares for twenty years, next to the burning ghats and corpses. It is said that she has eaten the flesh of dead children. The Maharani enters a broken sati cenotaph in the hills, carrying a basket of fruits and flowers. Jaya sees bats hanging from the broken dome of the tomb and monkeys scurrying. Sensing something slithering over her feet, Jaya screams and, running into a courtyard, practically falls into the lap of a woman sitting on a tiger skin at the base of a mango tree (Mehta, *Raj* 124-25).

Seeing a cobra slithering on to the tiger skin, Jaya suppresses another scream. The Sati Mata says that terror of a harmless snake is not the sum of the fear Jaya will know. Taking Jaya’s hand, she places it near the
snake. The cobra slithers up Jaya's forearm to coil itself around her wrist. Its forked tongue darts out, striking at the glass bangles sliding down her arm (Mehta, Raj 126). The Sati Mata tells Jaya: ““Go towards your fear, child. Only then can you find the courage to endure the life that stretches before you, exiled from your sex”” (Mehta, Raj 126). Upon hearing this, the Maharani bitterly says that she warned the Maharajah that he was educating his daughter to be a man (Mehta, Raj 126).

Ignoring the Maharani's outburst, the Sati Mata tells Jaya: ““Few will understand the high cost of your valour, child, the impoverishment of your spirit. But you must find the courage to live with your own barrenness”” (Mehta, Raj 126). At this prediction the Maharani is alarmed, but the Sati Mata reassures her that Jaya will many and bear a son. She also prophesies that Jaya will marry a great and ancient sword. The Maharani interprets this to mean that Jaya will be third or fourth wife to an ageing Mahatajah and says that Maharajah Jai Singh will never permit such a union (Mehta, Raj 126). The Sati Mata tells the Maharani: ““Your ambitions are so young, woman. Marriage, youth, power—all these are dreams that drift away like dust before the inevitability of death ..” (Mehta, Raj 126).

The Sati Mata continues:

'The title sati should not be given to a woman who burns
herself but to a woman of virtue. And the greatest virtue is endurance. I am called the Sati Mata because my gurus are the five Satis, those five virtuous women who refused to bum themselves on their husbands’ pyres. The true sati has the will to continue when the familiar world fragments around her.... You will also be known as a Sati Mata, Maharani-sahib. When the nagaras of Balmer Fort are smashed before your eyes’ (Mehta, Raj 127)

The Maharani is frightened because the Balmer nagaras can be broken only when Balmer Fort is conquered. Casting aside all her regal dignity, the Maharani prostrates herself on the tiger skin, ignoring the cobra turning towards her, begs the Sati Mata to show her a way to make reparation for any foolish actions that might have released evil influences and to give her a mantra to placate the anger of the Goddess. The Sati Mata chides the Maharani for believing in goddesses and mantras like a child (Mehta, Raj 127). The Maharani sheds tears and says:

'Only one who has achieved detachment could speak such words without profanity. But I am an ordinary mortal. My son fights another nation’s wars. My husband is under siege from his governing council in his own citadel. You say the nagaras will be smashed before our eyes. Your words are
Mil of death.... We have need of help, Sati Mata. I beg of you give me a mantra to protect our house against the threat of destruction.’ (Mehta, Raj 127-28)

The Sati Mata raises her hand in benediction and Jaya sees a red glow enveloping the ascetic’s palm (Mehta Raj 128). The Sati Mata says: “‘You have insisted on a mantra and I must give you one. This will be your mantra against fear, Maharani-sahib. Ram Nam Sat Hai. The Name of God is Truth’” (Mehta .Raj 128). The Maharani stands up and shoots back: ‘

‘The mantra of death! ... If the foundations of our house tremble, so be it. But I will not speak a mantra that should fall only from the lips of a widow following her husband's funeral pyre! I am the wife of Jai Singh-ji. I shall, never live on as Jai Singh's widow!... I am a Maharani of Balmer. Like my great predecessors, I shall bum myself, before I speak your mantra. (Mehta Raj 128)

The Sati Mata tells the Maharani to repeat the mantra until she has understood its meaning and then, closing her eyes, the Sati Maw appears to enter a trance and a voice seems to swell up from the earth and resonate in the stillness: “Ram Nam Sat Hai. The Name of God is Truth. Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!’” (Mehta, Raj 128).
In the summer of 1917, Tikka is wounded at Cambrai. He writes that Prince Pratap crawled under enemy wire to rescue him and carry him back to their lines, unaided by the Sirpur retainers who were lying drunk in their villages and that, therefore, the Balmer Lancers now treat Prince Pratap like a god. Upon reading Tikka's letter, the Maharani says that Balmer owes the Sirpurs a debt which can never be repaid and adds that the marriage of Jaya and Prince Pratap can no longer be delayed. Jai Singh, who does not favour Prince Pratap for Jaya, argues against the match but, ultimately tells the Maharani to do as she thinks best. Jaya is horrified to hear this (Mehta, Raj 132-33).

The Maharani exchanges horoscopes with the Dowager Maharani of Sirpur. From the convalescing Tikka's letters, Jaya learns that Prince Pratap is a heavy burden on the Sirpur treasury because he spends lavishly on dinners in hotels and courtesans in brothels. From the Dowager's letters Jaya learns that Sirpur is banking on Jaya's dowry to take the pressure of Prince Pratap's extravagance off the state. On the day that Jaya’s nuptial arrangements are concluded, the Sati Mata sends a garland of marigolds in blessing and repeats her prediction that Jaya will marry a great sword. As the engagement presents start arriving from Sirpur, the zenana is excited but Jaya is dispirited (Mehta, Raj 134-35).

The Maharajah returns from a secret meeting of Indian kings and
Indian nationalist leaders in Patiala to announce that he proposes, with the guidance of Maharajah Dungra and Mrs. Roy’s cousin, the lawyer Arm Roy, to devise a constitution for Balmer which the British Empire cannot alter to its advantage. The following month Jaya is finally and formally engaged to Prince Pratap. Jaya feels only revulsion at the sight of the portrait of Prince Pratap with his heavy-lidded eyes and bored smile. Kept in her room, the portrait seems to chill the chamber, but she has to garland it every day and recite prayers for the well-being of her future husband (Mehta *Raj* 135-37).

In January, the lawyer Arun Roy arrives from Bengal. Jaya and the other ladies of the zenana find him very handsome. Maharajah Dungra, a huge man, arrives with his equally huge son, who is paradoxically called Tiny. Jai Singh takes his visitors on a tour of his kingdom. Whenever someone trusted leaves the Fort to join the Maharajah, the Maharani sends her husband reports of the Council meetings and Raja Man Singh’s movements. Jaya carries the heavily sealed envelopes to the messenger and sometimes adds a note of her own. Once Jai Singh summons Jaya herself. The Senapathy drives Jaya into the jungle and stops near an abandoned fort. Horses are waiting for them. The Senapathy hands Jaya a spear saying that the Maharajah wishes her to gain some experience of riding with a spear, though there is no question of her trying to stick a
pig. He also hands her a pistol so that, in case she gets thrown, she can use it to frighten away any animals. They join the other spears who are waiting at a rocky nullah. Suddenly a boar is sighted. The Maharajah races after it, holding a dagger and not a spear. The boar is almost cornered by the Maharajah, Tiny and Aran Roy. The lawyer from Calcutta strikes with his lance but the lance snaps from the momentum of the animal's leap. The wounded boar races towards the lake, the broken lance sticking out from one shoulder. The boar moves in a straight line towards jaya's horse, its small eyes fixed on her. Remembering Major Vir Singh's instructions, Jaya spurs her horse to gain momentum so that speed will add strength to her blow. Jaya strikes correctly. Her wooden lance snaps, but the boar is also killed. Arun Roy congratulates her. Later in the evening a villager tells them that the boar killed by Jaya was old enough to have in its head a pig-pearl which is unparallelled, shines like moonlight and has magical properties. Throughout the day Jaya feels close to Arun Roy (Mehta, Raj 140-47).

After their return to the Fort, one day, Jaya is summoned by her father and Maharajah Dungra to her father's office. The table in front of them is covered with green files. They are the stock certificates which Maharajah Dungra gave Jai Singh in London in 1898 as gift on the occasion of the birth of his heir Tikka. Jai Singh has now made them over
to Jaya. He warns that Jaya should tell no one about the stock certificates, not even her mother or even her husband. Maharajah Dungra explains to her that it is like the secret cache of money for hard times kept by every good housewife, to be used when she needs something for herself. Dungra adds that until such an emergency occurs, his son Tiny and he will keep the wealth safe for her in Dungra. Jaya innocently asks if the papers are wealth. Dungra says that they are a new kind of wealth and that, in the twenty years since he bought them, their value has multiplied many times over. Jaya is saddened by the reminder of her impending wedding. However, she is pleased when Arun Roy, coming to say goodbye, hands her the pig-pearl from the boar she killed. As Arun Roy walks away, Jaya feels that she is his conspirator in a plot he has not yet revealed (Mehta, Raj 148-49).

Balmer celebrates Divali gaily. Two days later Maharajah Jai Singh congratulates the Maharani on having mothered a lion because he has received commendatory despatches from his son’s Commander-in-Chief, General Allenby, and from the Viceroy about the feat of arms and courage displayed by the Balmer troops in the Middle East. There is also a letter from Tikka hinting that he may soon come home. The Maharani cries upon hearing this. However, hard upon these arrives a telegram announcing the glorious death in battle of the heir to the throne of
Balmer. Maharajah Jai Singh goes berserk, but the Maharani, sans tears, issues appropriate instructions to Jaya. Lights are extinguished and cooking pots are smashed in Balmer Fort and the whole of Balmer is immersed in gloomy mourning. On the fifth day of the mourning, the Maharajah announces in the Durbar Hall that the war in the Middle East has ended (Mehta, *Raj* 150-55).

The Maharajah can hardly stand up as the homecoming Balmer Lancers bring home the ashes of Tikka. The Maharani goes berserk on seeing her son's ashes and, beating Jaya's shoulders with her fists, she screams that the Maharajah has killed her son by his senseless, hopeless rebellions against the Angrez. Kuki-bai asks Jaya to send for the Sati Mata because the Maharani has lost control of her senses. Then Kuki-bai sequesters the Maharani in her own chambers and asks the Baran to announce that the Maharani is performing a special puja for her son. Jaya goes to inform her father of her mother's condition but the Senapathy and the Raj Guru bar her way saying that the doctors are with him. When Kuki-bai learns of this, she despatches Jaya in haste to tell Maharajah Jai Singh that he should not eat anything from Raja Man Singh’s house. Jaya races through the corridors to do so, but the Household Guards bar her way, saying that the Maharajah is in Council. Jaya waits outside. When the doors are opened, Raja Man Singh comes out with fury writ large on
his face. Upon seeing Jaya, he puts on a show of sorrow and sympathy.

Rushing into her father's darkened bedroom, Jaya sees that his left foot is not encircled with the heavy gold anklet of sovereignty, which he is holding in his hands. Upon seeing Jaya, Jai Singh tells her that he has informed the Council that she is to become ruler of Balmer, with Raja Man Singh ruling as Regent until she comes of age, but he is not certain about what will happen after that. He urges Jaya to guard the honour of the people and complete the reforms he has begun. Jaya tells him not to cat lood from Raja Man Singh's house, but he does not hear her. When she repeats her warning, the Raj Guru embraces her and tells her not to look for conspiracy where there is none, adding that the Maharajah is dying because his time has come. He asks Jaya to call her mother. As though the Sati Mata has instilled her own strength into her, the Maharani serenely sits by the Maharajah’s deathbed until he is pronounced dead (Mehta, Raj 156-58).

As the priests prepare the Maharajah’s body for cremation, the Maharani sits by the bed, denuded of all signs of matrimony. She calls for scissors and cuts of her hair. Once the body is carried away, the Maharani is shunned and reviled by the women of the zenana as an unfortunate and unclean widow. The Maharani, following custom, breaks her bangles on a slab of stone. The old women grind the broken bangles into dust. Jaya
hits out blindly at the old women. But she cannot silence the obscene
litany. The Maharani passes regally under a shower of broken bangles
thrown on her by the women of the zenana. At the zenana temple the
Maharani tells Jaya that she wishes to be alone till the cannons announce
the performance of the Maharajah's last rites. She enters the Temple of
the Balmer Maharani, barring the wooden doors behind her. As Jaya
stands forlornly on the pathway, she hears the cannons announcing that
her cousin John is breaking her father’s skull to release his soul and she
curses herself aloud for being born a girl and so barred from the last rites.
Kuki-bai and the Sati Mata come running and ask after the Maharani. The
doors of the temple are broken open and the Maharani is discovered,
trying to commit sati. The Sati Mata lifts her burning body and flings it
unceremoniously into a nearby canal. Kuki-bai chides the Maharani
because Jai Singh’s grandfather, the Lion of Balmer, banned the practice
of sati forever. The Sati Mata asks for some balm and clothes for the
Maharani because the Raj Guru will soon send for her. As if on cue a
purdah lady delivers the message that the Raj Guru has urgently
summoned the Maharani (Mehta *Raj* 158-61).

At the final ceremony, the Raj Guru says:

‘Our greatest blessing has been the continuity of our kings.

For thirty-nine generations the anointed son has taken the
throne of the anointed father, and we have never endured the cruel wars of disputed succession. But any priest unfortunate enough to be Raj Guru of Balmer when the line of direct succession is broken is enjoined to mark the solemnity of the event by breaking the nagara drums of Balmer Fort\(^5\) (Mehta, *Raj* 161).

As Moti carries the nagara drums through the crowds, Raja Man Singh angrily protests: ‘“The nagaras can be broken only when we lose our citadel. I am Regent of Balmer. I will not permit this madness”’ (Mehta, *Raj* 161). As, ignoring the angry protest, the Raj Guru breaks the nagara drums with the sword of Balmer, the Maharani turns towards the zenana chanting: ‘“Ram Nam Sat Hai. The Name of God is Truth. Ram Nam Sat Hai. Let there be peace and peace and peace”’ (Mehta, *Raj* 162).

During the days of mourning, Jaya hears from the Baran that the Maharajah is rumoured to have been poisoned by Raja Man Singh and that Raja Man Singh has gone to Delhi to petition the Viceroy to overturn the Maharajah’s decree and let his son John succeed to the Balmer gaddi (Mehta, *Raj* 162). Upon his return from Delhi, Raja Man Singh triumphantly summons the Maharani to the public courtyard and shouts at the assembled people:

‘This woman's association with the House of Balmer has
ended.... She has neither husband nor son to keep her in her old age....

‘What shall we give widow? . . . It is written in our ancient scriptures that we owe the widow nothing—not the food from our cooking vessels nor the water from our wells. What shall we give the widow? ... (Mehta, Raj 162)

As Jaya clenches her teeth in revulsion at customs which can so strip her mother of regal dignity that pity and disgust mark the features of everyone in the courtyard, the Raj Guru advances on the crowds, his spare frame shaking with rage, his hands holding aloft gold bangles, and says:

‘Cruel and heartless race, you have called this woman Mother. It is your duty to succor her. . . . Fortunately, the Maharani of Balmer does not need the charity of those she has treated as her sons. The Maharajah of Dungra sends these as the sign of the brother.’ (Mehta, Raj 163)

Then the Raj Gum delivers a veritable thunderbolt:

‘A stranger opens his house to your maharani. A stranger places at her feet a brother’s wealth. Tomorrow I anoint Raja Man Singh’s son Maharajah of Balmer, In the ancient texts which chart the destiny of our country it was written that this
be so. But I will break the silence of the Raj Guru to tell you this. It is also written that the man who so eagerly mounts the Balmer throne after the nagara drums are broken will be your last king’ (Mehta, *Raj* 163)

With the exit of her widowed mother from Balmer, Princess Jaya is virtually a prisoner of Raj a Man Singh. He marries her off in a hurry and by proxy to Prince Pratap of Sirpur. The entire ceremony is a painful experience for Prince Jaya. In the past one year, amidst rumours about the sinister suddenness of Maharajah Jai Singh’s death, Raja Maan Singh’s son John has been crowned Maharajah of Balmer with the support of the British Empire. Consolidating its position, the new ruling family has so humiliated the widowed Maharani as to make her flee Balmer and seek sanctuary with the Maharajah of Dungra. The Roys have been dismissed from Balmer and their sentiments publicly denounced as seditious. Kuki-bai has been silenced and confined to the concubines’ quarters. Raja Maan Singh has hastened Jaya’s marriage lest she threaten his son’s throne. Since Prince Pratap is busy in Palestine, Raja Maan Singh, with huge sums of money, has persuaded the Sirpur Council to permit Jaya to be married by proxy. Rani Man Singh has systematically isolated Jaya so that the only person she speaks to is her maid Chandni (Mehta, *Raj* 165-68).
Going to Sirpur, Jaya commences a new set of battles. Her husband Prince Pratap and his elder brother Maharajah Victor are moral wrecks. The priests of Sirpur are a powerful lo, with their own ambitions and schemes. The national scenario is becoming more and more complicated everyday. Maharajah Victor commits suicide. Pratap becomes Maharajah, but cannot change his philandering ways. Jaya has to bail him out when he becomes the victim of a monumental case of blackmail. Then he gets himself killed in a flying accident and she takes over as Regent of Sirpur for her four-year-old son Arjun. When he grows up, he is killed by a communally charged mob in Calcutta while trying to save his Prime Minister Sir Akbar. Weathering all these challenges, Jaya signs the Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union and files her nomination to contest the elections in democratic India. She is able to manage all this because she studied *Rajniti* as an adolescent girl.