Chapter-4

Raj

There have been many attempts by various writers to write about the times of the British rule in India. This list includes some distinguished and capable writers like Rudyard Kipling, John Masters, Paul Scott, E M Foster and many more. But in the present time when postcolonialism is an established branch of literary studies, their views are categorized as British views because they cannot escape the prejudices of imperialism:

‘Our writing of India’s history is perhaps resented more than anything else we have done’- so write an Englishman... . But is true that British account of India’s history, more especially of what is called the British period, are bitterly resented. History is almost always written by the victors and the conquerors and gives their view point... . (The Discovery of India, p. 313)

Therefore it becomes necessary to hear such account of colonizer-colonized from the perspective of the erstwhile colonized people. It goes without saying that such accounts will reveal the feelings of being exploited and the anguish of injustice suffered. Many Indian writers have written on this line of post-colonial perspective. For example, Mulk Raj Anand’sThe Private Life of an Indian Prince, ManoharMangolkar’sThe Princes, Kamala Markandey’sThe Golden Honeycomb and NayantaraSehgal’sMistaken Identity. Though these works fit into the category of the voices of colonized, the perspective and the central characters are masculine in gender. On the contrary, Gita Mehta’s Rajpresents the story of Jaya – a princess. The whole story is knitted in
the terms of Jaya’s upbringing, her married life and widowhood and her metamorphosis through these years. Thus Raj is distinguished by its woman’s angle. The book allows the readers to ponder over an Indian woman’s life embedded in the history of Indian independence as she witnesses painfully the evolution of democracy in India. Undoubtedly, the novel is a saga of Jaya’s life. As a Rajput princess she grows up in Balmer, goes to Sirpur as a Maharani, governs as a Regent and finally applies for the election as a gesture of political commitment.

Though Raj is about Jaya’s long life, it will be a gross error to consider it solely as her story. Jaya’s story is embedded and intricately interwoven with the themes of erstwhile princely states, colonial oppression and injustice, the movement of Indian independence, and with the aspects of feminism. As it is also a story of a nation’s growth, the novel deals with subthemes like unity in diversity, our multiplicity, our response to postcolonial situation, partition, independence and many more. When the native rulers are affected, we come across direct narration of British Imperialism, westernization, independence, democracy and communalism. While referring to these aspects, the novel talks about nationalism, partition and socialism indirectly. Within this framework, Gita Mehta weaves the story of Jaya. The sphere of public life at national level as well as at the state level was marked with anxiety, fear, and submission. The sphere of Jaya’s personal life was not in a better state as it is marked by uncertainties, deaths and dejection. The author has knitted these threads so artistically that the work remains neither the historical record of our freedom struggle nor an account of splendor and dizziness of the princes. Gita Mehta has constructed the plot on family issues and family loyalty with reference to nationalism and colonialism. She has used history as an operating principle and used it with accuracy. As a result the scope of the novel is very broad. Through the evolution of an individual in the nation, the author has narrated the
evolution of India as a free country. Some critics have considered Jaya’s story as a symbol of India herself; as India moved through the tormenting time of late nineteenth century to independence in 1947. Thus Raj presents a deeper perspective on colonialism, feminism and history when read in the terms of postcolonialism and postmodernism.

Raj opens the possibility of being read as a postcolonial text, a historical narrative and as a feminist text. We can make such statement because it reconstructs the past in the terms of a diasporic writer. It also very eloquently criticizes the oppression of women. Invisibility of women in active political and social life and all-pervading dominance of patriarchal structure are important aspects of the novel. Thus the novel also represents an essential viewpoint of cultural, historical, political and social life with acute understanding and assertion. Encroaching influence of the colonial culture and the reality of the princely states have been expressed in clear terms. What adds to this is Gita Mehta’s advantage of being a diasporic writer and her distance in time and space.

Raj tells the story of two separate kingdoms- Balmer in Rajasthan and Sirpur in the north-east. The contemporary political scenario is referred to and described in the terms of rulers. Though the movement of Indian independence is an important aspect of the novel, it is never given the central focus. However, there are references to Gandhiji and his non-violence, Bhagat Singh, Subhash Chandra Bose, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, Sardar Patel, Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru. The increasing fury of the people and patriotic fervor has been captured in the narration. But these events come into the light through the rulers and sometimes through Mrs. Roy and Arun Roy.

The above introduction makes it clear that Raj cannot be interpreted from one perspective. Though the threads of different themes
have been knitted intricately, it becomes necessary to untie these threads on different lines. Therefore we shall discuss the novel in the terms of Jaya’s character, feminism, colonization, and erstwhile princely states.

Raj is a third person narration by an omnipotent narrator. The major portion of the narration is through the consciousness of Jaya. Weaving the contemporary political and historical threads, the narrator guides the readers through Jaya’s birth till the end of the novel when she fills up her application for the first election in independent India. The afterward reveals the suddenly changed attitude of the Indian government towards the erstwhile princely states as it discontinues the privy purses. At that time, Jaya would have been around seventy but we do not learn Jaya’s reaction or about her situation as the afterward is merely documentation of events. As a protagonist and heroine of the novel, Jaya is both, a mute observer and an active participant in the events happening around her. She is a mute observer of the events over which she does not have any control – political events whereby the princes were stripped off their ruling power; when her husband and other members of royal families cause their own downfall by extravagance and affairs. On the contrary she assumes an active role when she foresees the hovering crisis to be born out of socio-political flux. As a regent Maharani she brings reforms within the state. She also accepts the inevitable changes with flexibility brought along with Indian independence. She does not succumb to the pressure the way the Indian princes did.

Gita Mehta wrote Raj in 1980s and it was published in 1989. She has taken full advantage of her postcolonial situation. She gives Jaya the center stage. Jaya is endowed with abilities and intelligence and by utilizing these qualities, she achieves visibility. Since the novel describes a traditional world, Jaya is a marginalized character for she is a woman. On the contrary her husband is at the center as he is an agent of
patriarchy. Now the postcolonial aspect of the novel turns the situation
topsy-turvy and it is Jaya who becomes powerful in the course of time;
though it does not reduce her suffering.

The story of Jaya is a story of liberation – the liberation of a
woman. Her story begins in the oppressed and limited surroundings of
the harem and ends in a public office where she fills up her application
form of her political candidature for the election in newly independent
India. Through Jaya’s life, the novel concentrates on the history of
Balmer, Sirpur and Imperial British India. The events of the Indian
independence movement are described from the point of view of a
marginalized woman. Though Jaya belongs to the ruling family, she is an
outcast in the world dominated by the male. The novel is divided in four
books: Balmer, Sirpur, Maharani and Regent. These books symbolize the
growth and metamorphosis of Jaya as she is gradually trained to be a
‘ruler’. Her father, Maharaja Jai Singh, trains her in a way that she can
govern and administer a state if required. As a result she acts as a
Maharani and Regent successfully. She does not miss the caring touch
her father had.

In contrast to the feministic energy of the novel, the frequent
references to Queen Pushpavati are signs that reveal women’s strength
as rulers. Queen Pushpavati is renowned as the greatest queen in India.
The ballad singers appear on all the important occasions in the kingdom
and sing the praise of the legendary queen:

Two hundred years ago the great Queen Pushpavati was all
that remained of the sons of the sun.
Her father, her brother, her husband, all her great line lay
slaughtered in the City of the Hundred Temples. (Raj, p. 13
and 455)
The ballad tells the long story of the survival of the dynasty and how the land came to be known as Rajputana. The story highlights the brave queen and her son, and their lineage.

At the later stage of Jaya’s life, the story of Pushpavati suits to her situation as well. One by one she looses her male protectors – her brother, father, husband and son. Though she is left without any male protector, she has to protect her kingdom like queen Pushpavatihad to protect her child. In a patriarchal set up it requires a lot of courage. During her last visit to Balmer, the Raj Guru anoints her with a mark of blood on her forehead and reminds her of her duty to protect her people. The passage of time and change of perception suddenly surface when Major VirSingh observes that the Raj Guru had anointed her father as a king. Thus we realize that long back in 1987, Tikka’s birth was announced by booming thirty nine canons; while the present situation in 1949 announces the birth of democracy and of Jaya as an independent woman. Jaya has had a long attachment with the Raj Guru since her childhood. In fact, it the teaching of the Raj Guru which imparts confidence to Jaya in difficult times of governance:

‘First there is the praja, the people’, she whispered. The Raj Guru nodded in satisfaction. ‘I once told your father, as I am telling you now, this ancient land is old in the ways of government. It has witnessed the councils of nobles, and fiats of emperors, the whims of kings, the reigns of priests, the tolerance of great republics. Things go wrong only when men forget the first principle of government. ‘The people’. (Raj, p.453-54)

Such teaching in the important years of childhood is embedded in her mind. She is actually implementing these principles while acting as a regent Maharani.
Gita Mehta has given very specific treatment to the character of Jaya. The way she has been brought up in Balmer is full of contradictions. It seems that the author wanted to expose her to differing points of view and thereby to see how she grows as an individual. She might have done this to strengthen Jaya’s mindset and prepare her for the times to come. The very first lines reveal this contradiction, ‘On a cold January morning when Jaya was five years old, her father insisted she accompany him into the jungle. The Maharani objected.’ (Raj, p.1).

Jay’s father, Maharaja Jai Singh, was of progressive nature while the Maharani was conservative in her outlook. If Jaya fulfilled her father’s demands, she would hurt her mother or vice versa. Throughout her stay in Balmer, such contradictory elements remain present and also increase in intensity.

The differing opinions of James Osborne and Mrs. Roy are acuteexamples of the contradicting forces. Right from her birth, she is brought up in religious environment provided by her mother. Prayers, fasts and rituals matter the most for the Maharani. But Mrs. Roy has a critical eye for the things religious. She does not even remain present where priests are there. Though her mother’s teaching has an upper hand over Jaya’s perception, Mrs. Roy’s agnosticism disturbs her. Mrs. Roy brings with her numerous newspapers and magazines published by the nationalists. So the nationalists’ point of view is revealed to her by these writings. In sharp contrast to this perception, Captain Osborne represents the British point of view. In a single day, she comes across two contrasting interpretations of the same event, ‘There was no similarity between the Captain’s account of British India and Mrs. Roy’s version’. (Raj, p. 73) While explaining the importance of home spun cotton clothes, Mrs. Roy says that all Indians should put on clothes of such home spun material in India because it stops imported clothes and encourages the local business. Captain Osborne interprets it as an act of
ungratefulness towards the British. When the Assistant to the Secretary of State for India is assassinated in London, Osborne is furious and terms it as a murder. Mrs. Roy calls it an act produced out of the suppression. For her, the murder is the result of the Imperial injustice. The lessons of governance taught by the Raj Guru are again in contrast with Mrs. Roy’s views on kings of Royal India, ‘The lessons in the fort library added to the contradictions that increasingly confused her.’(Raj, p. 96) While the Raj Guru rigorously teaches the principles of kingship, Mrs. Roy talks of decline of monarchy by the rise of democracy. The Maharani is very keen to see her being trained as a woman. The Maharaja is trying to ‘make her into a son’. The influence of contradictory elements persists even in Sirpur. Mrs. Roy is still there with her nationalist fervor while Captain Osborne is replaced by Lady Modi. Lady Modi tries to make her British in appearance and manners while Mrs. Roy tries to awaken nationalism in her.

For few years Jaya’s early training has a pleasant combination of outdoor activities as per her father’s desires and the traditional classes as per her mother’s wishes. From music classes to Rangoli classes and thereon to the training of managing the royal household with the Maharani, Jaya goes in the afternoon to the English lessons, riding, shooting, polo and also to the lessons in Rajniti by the Raj Guru. Thus, instead of losing her identity in the women’s domain, Jaya develops a balanced personality—she has all the virtues the culture demands from a woman plus self-assertion, decision making and the ability to adapt to the changing circumstances. This soon ends when the Maharani thinks that the manner in which the Maharaja, Major Vir Singh, and the Raj Guru are training Jaya is masculine in nature. For her it is the damage done in the training of Jaya as a princess. She takes Jaya under her supervision and tries to turn her into a woman. The biological growth of her body heralds her womanhood but the Maharani wants to teach her
the art of being a woman – *solahshringar*– sixteen different ways to be an enchanting woman. In this process Jaya is increasingly made aware of her dark complexion and of her average beauty. Because of this she prefers the company of Major VirSingh where she is not evaluated in the terms of beauty.

The decision of Jaya’s marriage with Prince Paratap is full of agony and pain for Jaya. She considers it as a marriage of political convenience. What troubles her most is her repulsion for the bridegroom. She is married off to his sword in absentia. At Sirpur she eagerly awaits the news of Pratap’s arrival for a long time. When she finally meets her husband, all her hopes are devastated by his words:

I’m afraid you won’t do, Princess. You really won’t do at all. Wash all that nonsense off your hands and feet. And change out of these Christmas decorations. By lunch I hope to find an improvement. *(Raj, p. 108)*

It is a paradox that Tiny Dungra calls Jaya a ‘fearless princess’. But it is clearly evident in the story that Jaya’s life is replete with fear; fear mixed with agony of a rejected wife; fear for the safety of her husband and her son as their absence will put her in an unprotected world; fear of Pratap’s extravagance as it can lead to abduction of the throne; fear of the nationalist movement which can sweep away her kingdom. But it does not mean that Jaya is helpless Maharani who is not able to change the situation. She successfully maintains the decorum of being a Maharani and makes conscious attempts to solve the issues in the light of her political inheritance. Though she is situated in a position marked by colonization – Imperial as well as patriarchal-, never does she appear completely helpless.

After Jaya’s gallant show at the polo ground, the Prince of Wales is pleased and asks Prince Pratap to visit England with her. As a result,
Prince Pratap is also happy that he has finally got consent he has been longing for a long time. Even at this time Jaya does not receive a sympathetic look from him. It seems that he considers her as an object of display or a means to get through the Imperial machinery. She is again put in a forlorn and dejected situation when he leaves by saying that he is going to enjoy himself at last. The author does not miss to symbolize Jaya’s situation by the melancholic and mournful melodies of the flutes coming from the river side. Though her life is filled with such incidents of rejection and dejection, Gita Mehta has taken care not to reduce her character to the status of a mournful protagonist. Most of the period of her life goes in this struggle but it leads her to self-realization of strength. Sirpur Prime Minister’s meaningful parting words suggest her the power she can exercise. She knows that her assertion of herself cannot change the emotional rejection of her husband but can definitely improve her political stature:

A polo mallet can sometimes be as useful as a dagger. You have studied Rajniti, even if Prince Pratap has not. Such knowledge would give a wife great power over her husband if she used it intelligently, hukam. (Raj, p.227)

At this juncture we come across the most significant question of the discussion – Jaya as a woman. It is an acknowledged fact that Gita Mehta is not a feminist writer nor does she intend to portray the problems of women. Despite this fact, the novel is woman centered. While describing a woman’s journey from birth to old age, the author has consciously or unconsciously opened the avenue of discussion from feminist point of view. As a conscious reader if we read the novel on the line of feminism, it emerges as a strong feminist novel. Though it does not protest or fight against the male dominance and female oppressive social structure, it surely portrays the predicament of women, their oppression by the male dominant society and other problems of feminine
gender. However, this portrayal strictly refers to Indian scenario only. Jaya has all the problems an Indian woman may have; an uncaring husband, insecurity, loss of male members of the family, inability to participate in the political world, the expectation to be beautiful, the necessity to appease husband, unwilling marriage and embroiled social structure. To add to this agony, she is married off to a person in absentia whom she could never love as a husband and who in turn never accepted her.

Gita Mehta has depicted the character of Jaya in positive light. She has provided her with numerous opportunities and qualities that few women of her time could have dreamed of. Her upbringing in her earlier childhood proves to be crucial for her growth at a later stage. Because of Maharaja Jai Singh’s insight and political inheritance, Jaya is trained at par with Tikka at earlier stage. Her outdoor exposure, her training by the Prime Minister, her interactions with Mrs. Roy, her interest in Tikka’s activity and the insight into the governance imparted by the Raj Guru give her vision and boldness. Jaya comes across three types of women in her childhood home: British women like Mrs. Osborne, traditional women like her mother and the educated woman, Mrs. Roy. Among these ladies, Mrs. Osborne charms her the most. But she instinctively understands that she will never be able to become like her. Mrs. Roy’s has strong views about nationalism, freedom and democracy but Jaya is always baffled by her remarks. Mrs. Roy tries to ignite in her the spirit of nationalism and enlighten her about the current happenings in the subcontinent. But she fails to understand that Jaya belongs to a traditional social world primarily dominated by the traditions. She should have understood that even if Jaya fully grasps her teaching, she will not be able to transcend the constraints imposed by the expectations of the society. Very soon Jaya’s freedom is curtailed by the Maharani and she is taken into the myopic world of harem. However, the influence of
Mrs. Roy’s nationalist spirit imparted in her formative years stays with her and helps in difficult situation. Equivalent to the training of Mrs. Roy is the teaching of the Raj Guru. His rigorous teaching of governance is fairly reflected in her works as a regent Maharani.

The author has intricately described the life of the harem ladies. At the superficial level the lives of these women seem to be romantic, colourful and full of joy. There is a charming description of the women’s cunning yet meaningful jokes, their giggles, Kukibai’s tales and the excitement of learning ‘solahshringar’ make the atmosphere lively. The description of the Manvar ceremony is significant and erotic. The intoxicated women revel in fancy and their desires come to the surface. They all are exited and long for physical pleasure from men. It clearly suggests that the life of harem women is worse than a life of a well frog. Their only aim is to appease the men with sexual pleasure. Their lives are completely devoid of learning, enlightenment, exposure and vision. The poor concubines wait for the Maharaja every night and even if he sleeps with them only once, their lives are fulfilled. It indicates a pervert view point of the society to perceive women as a means of entertainment. A second thought on this situation makes us realize that these concubines are not allowed to come out of the harem only to curtail their lives in four walls. But the situation outside the harem is not healthy as well. A woman whether a maharani, a concubine or a wife of a common man has to satisfy the masculine gender in terms of sexual pleasure. If she losses her charm, her man will drift away toward some other woman. On the contrary, if a woman is dissatisfied, it does not matter. This predicament is subtly described in the following words:

But suppose your husband thinks your breasts are too small. Suppose your husband does not approve of your dark skin. Or does not think green eyes are becoming in a woman. How will you keep his interest then? We poor
creatures must use every aid to keep a man’s affection constant. (Raj, p. 104-105)

Jaya’s helpless situation as a woman is expressed in Chandani’s words:

You forget that you come from a great family and will have to make an important marriage. If you marry a ruling maharajah he will probably have other wives. He will certainly have a harem. How will you survive in such a crowd unless you understand the art of being a woman? (Raj, p.103)

The concept of harem and concubines reveal the insensitive and lustful attitude of the male dominant society. A maharajah is free to be polygamous and sleeps with any woman of his choice but a maharani has to be loyal to a single male. Apart from this, the concubines are deliberately kept in harem for the sake of a man’s pleasure. At this juncture, we must stop and refer to ancient India to see the women’s lives, duties and rights prescribed in ancient texts. The position of women in India was not uniform. But it is an acknowledged fact that they did not have free life and were always under the care and control of their elders males, and on son in case of elders’ death. But their status in the family was not undermined. Even Manu (called Manu Bhagwan by Hindus) who is not considered as an advocate of women’s rights, declares that gods are pleased with those households where women are held in honour. He also mentions that if a husband leaves his wife without sufficient reason, he should be punished by loss of cast. The wife was supposed to worship her husband as God even though he is devoid of good qualities. However, literature has many women characters which are fickle, quarrelsome and immoral. Therefore it can be assumed that the position of a woman in ancient India depended on her nature and virtues:
Ancient Indian sculptures serve as a mirror of a social life, and one notices women in company of their husbands at secular as well as religious gatherings, thus pointing to their active participation in social activities. They created endowments and gave donations for religious purposes, and their names are recorded in the inscriptions. (A Social, Cultural and Economic History of India, p.100)

Thus it seems that their position was not as worse as it is assumed to have been. There is no doubt that they were assigned the duty to look after their husbands and fulfill their emotional and physical needs. Manu has rightly suggested that husband and wife differ only in physique and are entirely united in function. He has made a provision that a wife persecuted by a husband or vice versa has a right to appeal to the court of king. The husband is liable for the economic sustenance of his wife. However, it will be an endless process to study our ancient scriptures. But it seems that with the passing of time men increased his dominance ignoring the ancient precepts and finally women were left with all duties, restrictions and no rights.

Coming back to our discussion we observe that by the time the princess is ten, Kukibai thinks she is ‘already a woman’. With the arrival of marriage proposal from Sirpur Jaya’s childhood ends. She has a hidden admiration and liking for James Osborne. But because of her father’s strong dislike of the British people she knows that the relationship cannot go any further. The decision of her marriage is important from the feminist viewpoint. An Indian woman is always dependent on father, husband and later in her life on a son. In the early part of the twentieth century, the women did not have much freedom. Their lives were dominated by the male counterpart. Right from the birth,
a girl is trained to make it sure that she learns every art to appease the in-laws. Perhaps this is the reason why the Maharani is worried about the training imparted by the Maharaja, the Raj Guru and the Prime Minister. She is afraid that such exposure to the external world would endow Jaya with unnecessary ability to think, react, resist and govern. When she is about 10 years old, the Maharani takes her under her total control. In the Indian scenario a girl child is treated in a manner so that she thinks that marriage is the only goal of her life. The Maharani’s remark is very subtle:

Who will marry such an overeducated girl? Her in-laws will resent her. She is twelve years old. At that age I was already engaged to be married. At the very time she should have become a woman, her father is trying to make her into a son. (Raj, p. 101)

Apart from marriage in the early years of teen age, the girls did not have any freedom to choose an appropriate bridegroom. Her parents, particularly her father, would take this crucial decision. In the princely states this situation was even worse as marriages were a means of political dealings. Jaya has to marry a prince who had a nauseating effect on her. In order to maintain this dominance it was necessary to keep the girls uneducated, unexposed to the progressive world and devoid of any right to assert themselves. Even in the progressive families girls were not educated on par with boys. As the Maharani says, ‘The boys of Balmer spend six years under the tutelage of the pundits. Even the girls receive three years of schooling.’ (Raj, p 36) Though girls are educated in Balmer, but it is not on par with boys’ education. Jaya soon realizes with an aching sense that she has ceased to be a carefree child. Her innocence as a child is curbed under the burden of do’s and don’ts of womanhood. Though Tikka is just sixteen, he imposes his rules on Jaya; do not speak to the Angrez boy, only speak to the servants, do not ask
too many questions and so on. It hints at the immense dominance of patriarchal structure on the lives of women. As if it were not enough, she is also supposed to follow the rules of the royal household. It has been rightly pointed out by Amina Amin:

Mehta creates a circle of oppressive forces which impinge on the lives of women like Maharani Jai Singh and Princess Jaya reducing them to the pawns in the socio-political game their men-folk play for them. (Writing in Post-colonial Space, p. 155)

Despite this situation, Jaya feels safe within the walls of the fort. The political atmosphere outside is so charged with imperialist policies and the native politics in opposition of each other that frightens Jaya. This is an important indication toward the dichotomy of home and world which is an issue for women’s liberation.

As the time of early twentieth century was of turbulence, it was swept with radical changes. Gita Mehta has depicted this situation vividly where rationalization and reforms come into the conflict with traditional norms. Three different threads dealing with women’s position in the socio-cultural set up run parallel in the novel through three male characters. Maharaja Jai Singh is genuinely interested in reforms and welfare of the subject. During the prolonged draught, he asks the Maharani to come out of veil and do the needful. Some critics have interpreted this act as a gesture to appease the British rulers. If we look the depiction of his character, it can be concluded as an act of reform and genuine concern. On the contrary, Raja Man Singh stands for the women’s subordination to the traditional rules. Prince Pratap symbolizes the colonized minds which have a vague approach towards reform and how they use it as a means for personal benefit.
Jaya’s transition from Balmer to Sirpur is a symbolic way to show her inward journey from girlhood to wifehood and later on to womanhood. It is also a journey of self-affirmation. Book two, titled as Sirpur, is a description of her experience of being rootless, lonely and uncertain. Her marriage and her entry into Sirpur is pathetic. She is carrying her husband’s sword in his absence. She is dumb struck at the sight of Sirpur fort which appears totally alien to her. Life and culture are different from those of Balmer. Even the life behind the purdah is equally new and foreign. She finds herself suspended in a limbo; she is a bride but not a wife. She keeps staring at the portrait of Prince Pratap and longs for his company. After a long time of waiting, the Prince returns to Sirpur and Jaya expects consummation of the marriage. But she is brutally rejected by him. He orders her to remove all her traditional decorations. The fatal blow to her dignity comes to her when he declares the nature of their relationship. For him, it is merely a marriage of convenience and therefore Jaya should not expect him to be her husband. However, he does not deny the necessity of an heir for the kingdom. Thus all her expectations and desires are annihilated. Totally indifferent to Jaya’s situation, the Prince frees himself of his responsibilities as a husband and indulges in his degenerated pleasures. Pratap’s behaviour reveals two important aspects: the crumbling effect of English education on local culture and the traditional male dominance over women.

As mentioned in the earlier discussion, the kings having several wives, a large harem and numerous girlfriends was an accepted fact. The number of dancing girls, wives and mistresses kept by the Maharaja of Patiala is alarming. What angers and frustrates Jaya is the dogmatic denial of her lawful wifehood. His clarification of why he had to marry her leaves Jaya ashamed and indignant. But she cannot retaliate or oppose as she does not have any power. The irony of the situation is that
Jaya with her sound knowledge of four languages and excellent English is of no use to Pratap. She had even tried to learn the local language of Sirpur in order to please her husband. But nothing of this comes to the rescue of her marriage. The reason is that she is married off to a person who is selfish, blind and insensitive. At this juncture, a feminist point of view regarding the decision of marriage gets vindicated here. Though Jaya’s father is a progressive man, he is still far away from giving liberty to his daughter for her choice in marriage. Particularly in Indian subcontinent, the decision of marriage has always been very crucial for women. What makes this decision crucial is that it is taken by the parents or many times by the father. The girl who has to marry is not consulted at all. Thus she has to accept the ‘given’ husband. As if it were not enough, the life at the in-laws is also not simple. As a bride, she has to satisfy all the members of the family. In these circumstances if a girl does not get her husband’s support, her life is almost destroyed. The rest of the life is a mere struggle and she keeps on longing but her desires are never fulfilled. This is exactly the situation Jaya finds herself in. After being married off to a husband not of her choice, she comes to terms with the situation and accepts him. But after his brutal rejection her entire life becomes a battle to win his favour. She also longs for warmth of a man in her bed but her nights are most of the times lonely. At one point, Pratap comes to her and the marriage is consummated. But it happens in an undesired manner. There is no love, affection and not even concern. The task is performed for the sake of an heir to the throne. It is insulting and repulsive. The author expresses Jaya’s frustration and disgust in the following words:

...Jaya found herself once again vulnerable to Maharaja Pratap, violated by the very act which should have been a proof of love. ... and tried to rid herself of the uncleansing memory of his embrace. ...as though he could not bear to
touch her until no longer he could see her, as if the night soiled him as it did her, and her humiliations hardened into a rage that mirrored her husband. Now only the necessity of an heir forced her to admit the ruler to her room. (Raj, p 306)

Thus she gets her marriage consummated but her psychological demands are not fulfilled yet. Later in her life, the presence of Captain Osborne makes her expect some warmth from him. Her childhood liking for him surfaces again. Once again, the game begins; the game of appeasing the English man. She accepts and implements all the suggestions given by him. She does it so apparently that even Chandni remarks about her willing submission of herself to the suggestions of the Captain. But she does not see her liking reflected on his face. Lady Modi warns her that even though he may have some liking for her, he would definitely prefer to be loyal to the Empire than to herself. Lady Modi’s remark is vindicated at a later part of the novel when Captain Osborne sends a secret report about Jaya’s relationship with ArunRoy.

Jaya accepts her husband’s harsh verdicts one by one with self-control and manages to carry on her barren life. But the author has not made this character to hide behind the curtain or to slide into the oblivion. At this juncture, her father’s training and the Raj Guru’s teaching come to her rescue. With the help of these elements Gita Mehta gives her the visibility derived out of her own capability. She learns to defeat him in his own game by quickly learning to be elegant in the terms of the western style under the guidance of Lady Modi. Very soon she becomes his companion to clubs and dinners; she plays polo and goes for hunting; travels with him to England; and takes decisions where the husband fumbles himself. But this gallant show has its gray side too. It does not come out of Jaya as a willing act. It is an act born out of her longing to win her husband’s favour. Again, the feminist viewpoint
explains this situation as helplessness of a woman; how a woman is held as a pawn to guard her marriage and her husband’s honour. Willingly or unwillingly she becomes a part of an act created to deceive the British and convince them that her husband is a progressive man fit for the throne. Whatever may be the motive behind this act, a woman is made to compromise with herself.

There is one more reason why the characterization of Jaya is important. It has been argued that the strength of an Indian woman lies in her spiritual superiority. The tradition also informs us about the superiority of women in the spiritual domain. In order to guard this superior state, women were kept away from the outside world. The fear was that the interaction with the world may spoil her inner world:

...the outer was considered the material domain which lies outside us and hence is a mere external that influences us, conditions us and forces us to adjust to it. Ultimately is it unimportant. The spiritual which lies within, is our true self; it is that which is genuinely essential. (Nation and its Fragments, p.120)

During the Colonial period, this invisibility of women became a subject of speculation. Thus Indian women became an enigma for the Imperial world. It allowed the British rulers to develop different perspective on the life of an Indian woman. Lady Modi reveals this fact when she tells Jaya that it is this life behind the *pardah* that has allowed the rulers create tales. She even refers to Rudyard Kipling who had mentioned that even the royal women from the Himalayan kingdom were sold out to the prostitution. Since the British Empire did not have any access to the female, such tales became credible to them. During the period of struggle of Indian independence, the leaders first time recognized the need to educate the women. This education would impart them some knowledge
of the progressive world outside their homes and thus they will be
stimulated to take active part in the freedom movement. In this regard
Gita Mehta’s depiction of Jaya is significant. She does not portray her as
a female stereotype. On the contrary, she is a female agent with a voice,
will and vision. Jaya is given her space. She is endowed with power to
bargain and she bargains well and hard. It is an act of assertion when
she bargains with Pratap for her title as a Regent. She gives away some
portion of her fortune and in return gets the documents declaring herself
as a Regent Maharani if anything happens to her husband. Pratap has
an addiction to danger and his life style makes him vulnerable to
untimely death. She realizes this fact and finds out a solution. It is a well
thought and intelligent act. She knows the harshness of the male
dominant society and has also witnessed its cruelty towards her widow
mother. By securing the title of a Regent Maharani, she secures her
future and also immunes herself against the humiliation and torments of
widowhood. At another occasion she takes a promise from Pratap that if
she played polo with the Prince of Wales, she would be exempted from
the dance during the dinner. Such acts make her feel empowered and
also prepare her to govern Sirpur as a Regent Maharani. This is how
Jaya stands apart from the traditional Indian women conceived by the
society.

In fact Gita Mehta has been very careful in portraying Jaya’s
character. She has invested power and opportunities in her; she does
assert herself and takes crucial decisions. But when it comes to the male
dominant social structure, patriarchal restraints and society’s
expectations from a woman, she has to come to terms with those
demands:
Her experiences are limited by history because of her class and her gender; her knowledge of the outside world is minimal and she is a prisoner of the patriarchy of the Raj. When she has the chance, though, she moves ahead and she learns that her real power is as a symbol for change in a free India. Jaya is not a modern woman or a revolutionary; she is a widow in her early fifties, who is not afraid to try something new for her country. (Journal of Narrative Theory, p. 5)

We find herself helpless against her father’s decision of her marriage; nor can she do anything against the injustice of the husband; she is abide by the restrictions and social norms. She is also as emotional as an average Indian woman. Apart from this she is not powerful in every occasion. There are certain occasions when she looses control over herself and weeps. She becomes a victim of Pratap’s nocturnal assaults and she finds herself as an object of consumption. When Jaya is furious regarding the matter of Pratap’s affair with Esme Moore, Lady Modi’s words are significant. “But darling, Pratap is the Maharaja. You have no powers. After all you have no rights beyond those he gives you.”(Raj, p 340) After denial of her wifehood she has to face the denial of her motherhood. Pratap does not allow her to breast feed her baby. Through her expression, she mentions that it was an unjust decision.

Jaya’s relationship with Arun Roy needs some focus. She comes close to him on her hunting expedition at Balmer. There seems to be a faint flavour of liking for him in her behaviour. At a meeting with the leaders of nationalist movement, she meets him again. He brushes his lips against hers and the desire is aroused in Jaya. Later on he makes a sympathetic remark “Poor Bai-sa. So many roles to perform and not one of them allows you to be a woman. But perhaps you do not yet know what it is to be a woman.”(Raj, p 298). But we know that it is a mock-
sympathetic remark. She is deliberately put into a situation of self-pity and it leads to self-assertion. In a weak moment she loses control over herself. She becomes prey to not only Arun Roy’s designs but also to her desires. One wonders why Jaya, even after knowing his nationalist motives, allows him to get closer. She is also fully aware that their relationship does not have any future. At apparent level this act appears to be a betrayal of the Indian womanhood but it offers multiple interpretations. It can be viewed as a denial to the socio-cultural hold over her body. By giving herself in the arms of Arun Roy, she rejects the do’s and don’ts carved out only for women. It can also be constructed as her march from a sacrificing Indian woman to the self-assertive ‘new’ woman. A simple justification would be the gratification of natural human desire. She may have done this as an act of vengeance on her uncaring husband who had used her body as a means to satisfy his lust without caring for the demands of her body. Arun Roy had raised himself to the position of an influential nationalist leader. He is going to address the people of Sirpur on the following day. Therefore the possibility cannot be denied that she sleeps with him to seek his favour in the speech he was going to deliver.

By the time Jaya falls into Arun’s design, the author has already made the readers sympathetic towards Jaya. It seems that after brutal denial of wifehood, womanhood and motherhood, the readers do not mind if she fulfills her desires. The postmodern and postcolonial critics have tried to interpret her character at human level. No doubts have been raised regarding her virtue. N K Jain explains that Jaya’s relation with Arun Roy does not diminish her nor is it inconsistent with her image as a sati:
The event is significant because it shows that Jaya is no ascetic and because it brings her long denied sexual fulfillment and also because it wipes away the humiliation she had suffered at the hands of her husband. (A Companion to Indian Fiction in English, p. 212)

In Jaya’s case, she would not have done this to justify; she does not need to justify anything to anybody, not even to herself. Jaya is also a bit aware that her three day expedition in the jungle with Arun Roy may create a scandal; and it does. Captain Osborne, as hinted by Lady Modi, prefers his loyalty to his liking for Jaya. He reports to the Political Office in Delhi regarding her intimate association with Arun Roy and also mentions her three days stay in the jungle with him. Jaya is angry and shameful. But the matter neither lasts long nor does it create any repercussion.

From the perspective of Jaya’s relationship with two men, Osborne and Arun Roy, the ending of the novel is significant. It shows that Jaya has scant faith in Arun Roy. It is also important to note that Jaya is more enamored of Osborne, ‘the blue eyed Angrez boy’ of her childhood dreams. But their relationship earns the readers’ respect as they maintain a respectable distance and Osborne never tries to take advantage of her vulnerable situation. It is arguable that Osborne’s cautious attitude is born out of his duty consciousness and self-restraint or out of his notions of racial superiority of the colonizers:

But after the British began to rule India, not as traders but as a kind of superior caste, sex with the native became a taboo...The taboo was no doubt broken on some occasions, but this degraded the white sahib in Indian as well as British eyes. So even though every encounter between Jaya and Osborne is charged with erotic attraction, nothing
happens, nothing can be allowed to happen. (New York Review of Books, p. 3)

Whatever may be the reason, Osborne appears far more dignified than Arun Roy.

The ending of the novel is significant interpretation of Jaya’s character. It is the understanding and acceptance of the traditional Indian principles of governance that mark a new beginning for her. In the last few lines, Osborne and Arun Roy claim their credit for having taught the rulers democracy. Osborne says that it was the dream of the British Empire to teach democracy to the princely states while Arun Roy claims that the Empire did not know about democracy. Jaya is amused at their naivety to put across tall claims and taking credit for something which had always been a part of Indian kingdoms. Jaya laughs in the end as if discarding their claims with indifference. With a suspicion about Arun Roy’s victory in the forthcoming elections, she wonders what would happen to the kingdom’s tribes and different religions. She feels that he will neither listen to their voices sympathetically nor raise their demands. She is concerned for the marginalized tribes in her kingdom and wants to highlight their predicament in the new political set up. The words of the Raj Guru keep on reverberating and motivating her, “...your Dharma is protection Bai-sa. You cannot escape your destiny.” (Raj, p 454). Jaya’s laughter has an indication that there is no sense of loss. She feels that her kingdom has assimilated into the Indian Republic for greater good. It seems that the novel ends on a happy note but the afterword has altogether a different tone. In contrast with Sardar Patel’s assurance of privy purses, the government abolishes the provision for privy purses in 1971. We do not know whether Jaya would have reacted vehemently to this change. But Gita Mehta’s words can be considered as an authentic remark: it was an act of betrayal, a breach of faith.
Jaya faces her ‘barren life’ with courage and finally achieves her freedom from the confining limits of the patriarchy. In this sense, she becomes historical. The reason is not that she is a part of a royal family or not because she is a part of colonial history of India. It is because she becomes a woman like the one of nationalist movement. As such woman she makes a fine mixture of feminine values and the masculine qualities. Here, Gita Mehta seems to suggest that the source of women’s liberty from the clutch of the society is the synthesis of the inner world with the outer world, the spiritual and the outer world.

Gita Mehta has not used only the character of Jaya to highlight the life of a woman and her predicament in the princely states. It is evident with almost all the female characters. Apart from this there are certain incidents and specific remarks which show the state of women in Indian subcontinent. Apart from Jaya, another important female character is that of Maharani Jai Singh. Like Jaya, the Maharani is also governed by the inner domain of the traditional culture. Her frame of mind is deeply steeped and died in the impositions and restrictions imposed by the society. Thus she is not only conditioned by the traditions but has also internalized them those norms. She cannot and does not trespass the line drawn by the tradition. Jaya is tender and raw and she could have been adapted herself to the emerging demands of the changing socio-cultural set up. But the Maharani holds her fast and pushes her behind the purdah. She is so assertive about her way of upbringing Jaya that she even neglects the Maharaja’s instruction that she should not be raised in Purdah.

Maharajah Jai Singh is portrayed as a progressive ruler who is genuinely interested in the public welfare. During the draught of 1898, he demands his wife to come out of Purdah and move in the common masses to help the needy. She is almost paralyzed by this order. She finds herself at cross roads. If she breaks Purdah, she will be like
eunuchs- not woman within the harem and not man among the men. If she refuses to come out of Purdah, she disobeys her husband and puts him in a shameful situation in front of his subject. Here her reluctance to come out of the veiled life and public’s embarrassment at her ‘naked face’ show how deeply the tradition has gone into socio-cultural psychology. On her return from the tour she is treated as an outcast. Her entry into the harem is prohibited as she has broken the eleven hundred year old tradition. The Purohits also declare that she has interacted with the common people and so she is polluted. Therefore she has to undergo a process of purification before she can enter the zenana. It has a stench of perverted patriarchal powers. If the Maharajah moves out among the subject, he is not polluted as he has been anointed by the gods, whereas the Maharani is ‘only his wife’ and so needs purification. Here the words ‘only his wife’ are clearly indicative of women’s inferior status in the society.

The codes of patriarchy have been oppressive, unjust and exploitative since ancient times in India. It has always been an inferior status to be a woman. Even their status in the society does not matter. May they be Maharanis, concubines or the women in the harem, their job is to satisfy man’s lust, uphold his status and blindly follow his commands.

The life becomes pathetic for Maharani after the death of the Maharajah. Because of her widowhood she is declared unclean and polluted. Suddenly she has become unfortunate. Maharajah Man Singh’s declaration is a clear statement of the inhuman nature of the society:

The woman’s association with the House of Balmer has ended. She has neither husband nor son to keep her in old age. What shall we give the widow? ...It is written in our old scriptures that we owe the widow nothing- not the food
It seems that Gita Mehta is bold enough to raise such sensitive issue to the western readers. The above lines from Raj are loaded with naked reality. If a woman becomes a widow, her life ends – either literary or metaphorically.

The author has referred to the concept of sati in the novel more than once. The term generally refers to a recently widowed woman who immolates herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. It sounds very inhuman and barbaric to set ablaze a woman just because her husband is dead. The reason behind such tradition stems from economical dependency. In earlier time Indian women were entirely dependent on husbands for sustaining their lives. In a case of her husband’s death, the rest of life becomes intolerable and bleak. Apart from this, her life is extremely vulnerable to sexual assaults in absence of her male protector. Therefore women used to end their lives. It unearths an inhuman side of the Indian male dominant society which neither ensured safety for a widow nor allowed her to get married again. So the way out was to make her immolate herself with husband’s dead body. By portraying widows like Jaya and Maharani Jai Singh, Gita Mehta explains that a widow is not unclean or unholy; nor does she bring bad luck. She implies that sati means a virtuous woman. A sati is one who is brave enough to carry on her life in the absence of husband. The concept of sati runs through the novel in different forms. Maharani Jai Singh achieves a reputed status of Sati Mata. It is not any supernatural or miraculous power that imparts her the status; it is the philanthropy and her vision for the welfare of the public that earns her reputation.

Going back to Maharani Jai Singh’s life, she receives humiliation and dejection from the state of which she had been a Maharani and from
the subject which used to call her ‘mother’. It shows that even if a
woman is a Maharani or belongs to a royal family, it does not come to her
rescue once she looses the male shelter. The exiled Maharani has to stay
in the Dungra kingdom in an ashram. She engages in social welfare
activities and later in her life joins the movement for independence. By
indulging in such activities she achieves the status of ‘Sati Mata’. At this
juncture the novel seems to affirm the role of the nationalists and the
independence struggle in liberation of women. It was through these
elements that women could raise their voices. It proved to be an
opportunity for them to connect with outer world and thereby generate
the consciousness. The Maharani’s journey from the veiled royal life to
Gandhiji’s ashram and then to the Dandi March is her transition from
inner world to the outer world.

To conclude the discussion on feminism, we must quote some lines
from the anonymous letter from a lady. She is believed to be a Maharani.
Her letter contains all the problems of women in nutshell. It is a master
stroke by the author. Though the following quotation exceeds normal
limit, it can be justified as the crux of above discussion:

For generations we have quietly suffered untold and
unbelievable wrongs. Our grandmothers....allowed
themselves to be treated like pet dogs. Our mothers cried
and killed themselves when the agony was unbearable. I
did not understand what marriage was except that in
future I had to stay with strangers.
We are treated like chattels. We are taught to be slaves.
Our duty is merely to satisfy the whims of our masters. We
are deprived of our self respect. Our existence is a mere
cipher. We are the toys of our master. He may dress us or
tear our clothes away. (Raj, p 247-248)
The other two vital themes of the novel are the depiction of the erstwhile princely states and colonial injustice and exploitation. Though both these aspects are interwoven, we shall try to discuss them separately as much as possible; discussion on princely states followed by colonization. The aim of this separate discussion is to make it sure that colonization is not overshadowed by the discussion of princely states.

Rajis an important discourse on the colonial assertion and violation of indigenous set up in India. This experience is distressing. The period she depicts in the novel—roughly from 1897 to 1947—is of significance from historical point of view. It was the time when the Indian rulers were in entanglement with the British rulers. People living in British India were helpless and troubled. But the native rulers were equally troubled and more helpless. Though they were rulers, they were frightened to the core. The Rajas and Maharajahs were made powerless and their status was reduced to the one of a pawn. The prologue itself reveals the fear of Maharajah Jai Singh, ‘Not until she became a ruler herself did she comprehend that the Maharajah taught his children the tradition of courage when he was himself a frightened man’. (Raj, p 13) The element of fear among the rulers is all pervading the novel. Initially it is the fear of displeasing the British rulers; if they are displeased they will be black listed or disinherited for a negligible reason. Then there was fear of the nationalists and of the reforms. They were rigorously spreading the message of freedom among their subjects. Then the final blow comes in the form of a compulsion for the merger with the Indian republic.

Gita Mehta gives a vivid picture of these kingdoms, kings and their governance, life of common and royal people in kingdoms and most importantly vices and virtues of kings and of their governing policies. She again seems to be neutral in her portrayal. She shows both the sides of the coin and the judgment is left for the readers. Through the portrayal
of Maharajah Jai Singh, the author has made an attempt to show an ideal king. The first book is replete with evidences for the goodness of Jai Singh. The first vital situation which establishes him as an ideal king is the draught continued for seven long years. He constantly moves among the people trying to administer their needs. He even forces the Maharani to break eleven hundred years old tradition of purdah and she goes to the public and looks after the relief work. He says that the public calls him ‘Bappa’ (Father) and therefore by implication she is their mother. Her Dharma is the protection of her children. The Maharajah is kind enough to open the doors of the grains storage which is reserved for the royal family. Though his own treasury exhausts, he does not discontinue the relief. He strikes a deal with a Tsar of Russia by selling a precious diamond to him. He is afraid that if the British rulers come to know about this, he will be disinherited from the throne but for him what matters the most is the welfare of the subject.

The policies of the Maharaja Jai Singh are impressive. Once a month he goes to the countryside to attend the court of appeal. This session is organized for the cases which are not settled at the village and district courts. He also takes Tikka with him to impart him the firsthand knowledge of judiciary. The rules for the royal family are examples of Maharajah’s concern for nature. No royal woman is allowed to eat fish until there was enough water in the reservoirs. During the mating season of the animals, hunting is prohibited and they do not eat meat during this time. People are not allowed to cage to birds. The judiciary system of the villages is impressive. A group of elders of five villages will pass a judgment on disputed matters and they can overturn even the king’s laws. When the British Empire is planning to set a new system of Secretariat, he goes to villages and counsels the poor and illiterate people. He tries to prepare them for the new system in advance. All these rules show the sensitive and sensible sight of his character. His
humbleness is revealed in his words, “No one has hereditary powers, only hereditary duties.” (Raj, p 155) Another example of a devoted royal family is of the Dungras. Tiny Dungra is a sensible ruler and sensitive human beings. He remains loyal in his friendship with Jai Singh and gives a respectable place to Maharani Jai Singh in his kingdom. All the social welfare activities of Sati Mata are solely funded by Tiny Dungra and he never questions whatever may be the amount.

The author has given a detailed description of gallantry and bravery of the ruler’s armies fighting in the World Wars. The Balmer army is led by Tikka who is in his teen age. Jaya’s son, Arjun, joins the troops and spends months fighting along with them. There are scattered remarks about the pride these rulers have for their royal blood and for their loyal armies. It suggests a significant point. Though they enjoyed the royal life with numerous privileges, it is this people who were ready to die for the state and honour. In fact they considered it a prime honour to die for the protection and honour of people.

However genuine king he may be, Maharajah Jai Singh is not an exception from the Imperial injustice. On one hand the Colonizers had their forces which are reducing the power and rights of the kings under one pretext or the other. On the other hand his inability to practise his traditions pains him a lot. The situation of such incapacity infuriates Jai Singh. If the kings indulge into activities of welfare and raise the problems of their subjects, they were suspected. If they wanted to educate their sons in India, they were threatened. They are forced to send their sons to England for education but the children had to face discrimination and some times humiliation in the foreign country. Tikka plays good cricket but he is not selected in the school cricket team. The furious Maharajah tells Mr Osborne in clear terms that it is an injustice to the natives. Frustration of being helpless rulers is evident at more than one places. On one occasion Jai Singh is present when the Raj
Guru is teaching Jaya the four rules of Rajniti- Saam, Daan, Dand and Bhed. He displays the present situation by altering the interpretation:

Saam, I tend 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 the Monarchy than Bhed? Intrigue, flattery, imitation....(Raj, p. 91)

The British Empire was usurping the states swiftly. For them a little incident was enough to disinherit the kings. Maharajah is furious at such policies of the Empire. Most of the major kingdoms are at peril. The Udaipur’s fortune is now under the custody of the Empire. The Maharajah of Baroda is already warned and ordered to ban Mazzini’s books. Balmer is forced to send Tikka to England for education. Manipur and Rewa are under observation. In the south, the thrones are at risk as the kings have been progressive in the welfare of the subject. These are few names; the whole subcontinent was swept by the British Empire’s usurping policies. The rulers themselves are in a terrified state. In the billiard room the Maharajah breaks the toy soldiers. It has been repeatedly depicted in the novel that the Maharajahs had become pawns in the British Empire. It seems to be mocking remark of the Maharani when she asks the Maharajah to

go to London and raise the issues. We know it very well that he will not be able to do that. At Prince Pratap’s coronation, the presence of the Viceroy was inevitable to recognize him as a ruler. There is a mere display of the power of the Maharajahs but we are constantly reminded that it is a show and not a reality.
In contrast to the character of Maharajah Jai Singh, Gita Mehta portrays other characters to show the vices of native rulers. For example Prince Pratap and Maharajah Victor are extremely extravagant in their ventures. Their expenses are hazardous to the state treasury. To add to this, they indulge into extra marital affairs with foreign stars and actress. They become so blind in their pursuits that Maharajah Victor loses his life while Jaya has to use her intelligence and fortune to save Sirpur from being disinherit. A classic, comic and ironic example of the caprice and extravagance of the rulers is of the Nawab of Junagadh. He spends a huge amount on his dog’s marriage. He has built three hospitals for animals but there is none for the subject. There are fans and fire places for his eight hundred animals. While the primary requirements of people are not fulfilled, his dogs are fed from gold and silver dishes. But the author is not ready to let down the Indian Rajniti easily. At one juncture Maharajah Jai Singh says that the governing principle does not allow spending more than seven percent of the income on personal expenses. So the extravagance is a vice of the rulers and not of Rajniti. By portraying vivid rulers and their different attitudes Gita Mehta seems to be showing the real picture of that time.

Gita Mehta’s attempt seems to be to show to the western world what the Kingdoms were and what they should have been. They were like Sirpur, while they should have been like Balmer. She also hints at the ancient policies of governance—Rajniti. The welfare of the subject, development of the kingdom, peace and justice, and security of people were the basic principles of Rajniti. The author has put the ideal governance policies in the mouth of the Raj Guru

“These are the four arms of the kingship. A king must tend his people. He must provide for their welfare. He must be implacable in dispensing justice. A king must intrigue with other powers for the welfare of his state.”( Raj, p 98.)
In fact the British had developed a specific manner in order to entertain the native rulers. At apparent level they were projected to the grand scale; while only the kings knew their actual submission. In addition there were devouring policies to keep them under control. Schemes like gun-salutes, decorations, and conferment of honour were performed to keep the kings happy. But it had hidden motives too; to divide the rulers and to set them against one another to grab more honour. They started flattering the British rulers. If a British master was offended, the native ruler was degraded several ranks below and thus had to face humiliation. Such tendency compelled them to spend heavy amount of money on amusement of the British. This was the money they were supposed to spend for the development of the kingdoms and welfare of the subject. Since their powers were curtailed, they had almost nothing to do in the kingdoms. Therefore they indulged into several vices inviting harsh consequences.

The ruler of Sirpur is not an exception among the native rulers. Victor is spending fanatically on the American actress. The pursuit proves to be fatal for him. His brother, Prince Pratap has been attracted by Esmee Moore. As per his amorous nature he gets involved with her. The affair goes to the destructive proportions and Pratap has to seek Jaya’s help. It is Jaya with her fortune that saves Sirpur otherwise almost disinherited. When Pratap is to be coroneted officially, the Viceroy decides to grace the function. The expenditure of the event and its arrangement exhausts the Sirpur treasury. Even the Prime Minister is worried about the funds but Pratap does not have any concern. It is a get together as well as an opportunity to appease the Viceroy for all the native rulers. In doing so they put themselves in a ridiculous situation.

Gita Mehta does not miss to pass on razor sharp remarks as in *Karma Cola*. For example, on the day of Pratap’s coronation the Dowager Maharani points to a square object which is covered with red silk clothe.
That is only a portion of The SirpurGaddi'. In a sense it is disintegrated as the rulers have fragmented. Another incident brings out the hollowness and vanity of the imaginative world they are living in. The Raj Guru while handing over the royal sword of Sirpur to Pratap says, “This sword is the final power of the sovereign, the symbol of justice. But there is no justice without Dharma, and Dharma of a king is the righteous service to his people.” (Raj, p. 282). The words like Dharma and justice did not have any significance in their world. While the rulers themselves are at the mercy of the British, how would they fight for the righteous service of the subject? The ancient principles of governance were not significant any more. As a matter of fact those principles seem to have become myths, far away from the reality. As Dungra says,“Dignity? Dharma? You live in past Jai. Such words have lost their currency.” (Raj, p 30)

The British Empire and its policies had stripped the native rulers off their dignity. They were made powerless; in a condition neither to administer the state nor to raise their voices to the Empire. On one hand they had fear of breaking age old traditions while on the other they were afraid of colonial usurpation. As if it were not enough, they had to confront with the reformist as well as nationalists. It will not be an exaggeration to call the British tactics as Machiavellian practice. First they would encourage the rulers to spend beyond limits and then try to liquidate the kingdom on the basis of excesses and extravagance. In order to survive in such difficult time, the native rulers had evolved survival tactics; flattery to the British officials, silence and low profile, to help the nationalists secretly and so on.

The states and the rulers gain our sympathy towards the end. Before independence, the British Empire declares that in the governance pattern the rulers will hold fifty percent share in the upper house of the parliament while one third seats in the lower house. Those two houses
will govern India and the states will remain intact. But the offer is not as simple as it sounds to be. The Empire required majority of the rulers to join the Federation. Apart from this, smaller kingdoms were forced to merge with the larger ones. Simultaneously there were threats from the nationalists and the reformists. But the independence of India brought a fatal blow for them. They were forced to join the Indian Republic by merging their kingdoms. It was an act of liquidation of their identities. But what tormented them the most was that it would annihilate their identity. It was nothing but personal humiliation and defeat. From their perspective, they were right. Someone who is born and brought in a royal family and who has ruled the kingdom is suddenly forced to become a common man. Perhaps this was the reason when the Chamber of Princes passed a resolution in 1944 requesting the British government not to leave the rulers in ‘No Man’s Land’, if independence was granted to India. Many times they hindered the proceedings of important conferences including round table conference. Although it was in the betterment of the country, it carried an agonizing experience for them. It may be argued that the rulers did not have any significant role in the struggle for independence. But it cannot be denied that they sacrificed their land, identity and large fortune for the country. Let us refer to a historical fact as evidence. On Second November 1947, the Maharajah of Baroda wrote to the Home Minister of the government of India in his own handwriting that unless the government accepts his terms and he is declared the King of Gujarat, he would not cooperate with the team. He would also not help to subdue the revolt of the Nawab of Junagadh. But the stern actions taken by the government left them with no choice but to merge.

However, the government was not blind to this sacrifice. The words of Sardar Patel are significant:
Disabling their armed forces, the Indian rulers merged voluntarily with a nation that did not even have a constitution. In return, the Union of India agreed to pay the rulers privy purses to assist in the discharge of their financial obligations.

Our obligation is to ensure that the guarantees given by us are fully implemented. Our failure to do so would be a breach of faith. (Raj, p 462, 478)

However the faith was breached in 1971 with the declaration of discontinuation of privy purses by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India.

Even a single reading of the novel is enough to realize the tone of anger while depicting colonizers, their policies of usurpation, their method to divide people among themselves, utter injustice and exploitation. As a postcolonial text, Raj openly discusses and proves the above mentioned aspect of colonization. Homi Bhabha has termed colonial discourse as ‘an apparatus of power’. It asserts its power so vehemently that the indigenous culture and history are either distorted or destroyed. Gita Mehta mentioned in an interview that she had done a lot of research work while writing the novel. It took nine long years to complete the novel. Thus she has restructured the history, events and facts to from the web of the plot. In order to create temporal and special setting of the novel, she has re-visioned and rewritten the past. As a postcolonial writer, she has tried to bring the ‘margin’ or ‘the other’ to the center. History, otherwise mere factual data, has become an authorial creation. It is the history shaped by an author’s intensions and interpretations to write a literary text.

Critics have not objected to rewriting of the history in Raj because it is done in a neat and honest manner. As a postcolonial writer, Gita
Mehta has an advantage because she has an opportunity to interrogate the nature of Imperial period and out of this interrogation comes the socio-political set up of the novel. For a diasporic writer, it is necessary to stay connected with the past because it carries positive dimension of remembering the mother land.

The rhetoric of the novel clearly mentions that the effect of imperial and colonial policies on the native rulers and common people was crippling. The British Empire practiced the principle of difference and superiority and of cultural and economic exploitation. Fidelity and flattery to the British Empire had become necessary means to gain fervour. In fact their sole aim to overpower the subcontinent was possible only by showing the superiority of the western culture. First they got control over the native rulers and through them they exploited common people. By forcing the rulers to send the young princes to England, they wanted to uproot them from the cultural heritage. Since Gita Mehta has referred to Macaulay, it will not be improper to quote his famous address to the British Parliament

“I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native self-culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation”. (“Clearing the dust off Macaulay’s famous quote”, www.satyamev-jayate.org)
Edward Said has given definition of imperialism and colonialism which is relevant here:

Imperialism, the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost always conscious of imperialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory. \textit{(Culture and Imperialism, p.8 )}

Both the concepts, imperialism and colonialism flourish on the sense of superiority and inferiority. With their ability to exploit they consider certain races or countries as ‘subject races’. In their view such races require domination and proper governance and thus they invade their rights and enslave them. The natives were tactfully taken into this design through gradual usurpation.

There were exorbitant taxes on the kings and common people. They did not have any right to raise their voice. There was no consideration of the pathetic condition of the poor farmers. During the seven years long draught described in the novel, the British Empire continued to collect taxes. Though the people were dying of hunger and malnutrition, grain was being imported to Britain to feed their people. The narration of famine and England’s mishandling of grains in the Bengal famine is so inhuman that it may appear fictitious. But the evidence of this merciless governance is found in Nehru’ book:

Famine came ghastly, staggering, horrible beyond words. In Malabar, in Bijapur, in Orissa, and, above all, in the rich and fertile province of Bengal, men and women and little children died in their thousands daily for lack of food. But a million had died, or two millions or three; no one knows how many starved to death or died of diseases during those months of horror. \textit{(The Discovery of India, p.2-3)}
As if it were not enough, a Jubilee celebration was arranged in England. Such extravagant event was sustained by the money extorted from the people dying in lack of food. It reveals the inhuman nature of colonialism.

Discussion between Maharajah Jai Singh and Osborne sheds light on the encroachment of the Empire. Maharajah of Rewa was disinherited from the throne because he had punished some money lenders. The pretext put forward was that of his cruelty. However, the punished money lenders had exploited the peasants during famine. On the other hand, a British officer had killed defenseless Indianservants for his sport. He made them crawl on the floor and pierced them with lances until they bled to death. Referring Lord Curzon’s policies Maharajah says that he had closed Indian newspapers. The natives were not allowed to appear in the competitive examinations. He interfered with the states of Hyderabad and Bengal. These are few examples of the British rule.

The British Empire organized gala events and every time extravagance increased to dangerous proportion. But the threat was not to the Empire but to the treasury of rulers. They were compelled to offer expensive gifts including gold and diamonds. Thus the Empire itself was spending extorted money and at the same time was charging the rulers for exorbitant expenditure. Unnecessary spending of public’s money is always wrong. But if we compare the Empire and the rulers, we can say that the rulers were spending money of their own subject for which they were even ready to die. On the contrary, the Empire did nothing but exploited the rulers as well as common masses. The Prince of Wales can have an affair with Mrs. Simpson, a married woman but the Indian kings are not given even a single chance to explain the allegations of affairs.

It seems that the author has used the character of Maharajah Jai Singh to express the anger prevailing within every Indian. His words have
a clear sign of anger and revolt against the Empire. He is also afraid of
the English education which is an unknown element for him. But he is
sensible enough to imagine its repercussions. Tikka is fortunate enough
not to have ruined himself like the Sirpur boys. But there is a clear ring
that his frame of mind is being colonized by the English education and
he is going away from the traditions of the native. He understands that
the British look down upon them as ‘natives’ or ‘the other’ and they
discriminate on the colour of skin. But it is the result of his education in
England that he prefers them. The airplanes, the underline railways,
industrialization and the explorers racing to the two poles mesmerize
Tikka. Balmer appears primitive now. Prince Pratap epitomizes the
colonized mind. He flatters the British and despises the natives. Even his
wife has to undergo a training to change herself; to make the British envy
Pratap for her; to make herself a woman who is desirable to white man.
Mrs. Roy explains to Jaya, “The British have taught your husband to
hate himself. Do not become like him, or you will belong nowhere” (Raj,
p.242) What Macaulay planned had come true. A generation was created
which talked the master’s language but was not ‘equal’ in rank; which
was wonderstruck at the progress of the British; which was painfully
aware of the weaknesses of its primitive culture but could not help it.
They were suspended in a limbo; not raised to the level of the British and
they thought themselves to be above the fellow natives. It was on the
band of such people that the whole British machinery operated.

The portrayal of colonial unjust governance goes hand in hand
with depiction of the movement for Indian independence. As far as major
events are concerned, they are perfectly factual. It seems that the aim
behind describing these events may be to reaffirm colonial barbarism. We
shall refer to some major events described in the novel. On October 26,
1927 British Government declared a commission under the
chairmanship of Sir John Simon. The commission had to search into the
Indian constitutional problems and provide suggestions. The people of the Indian subcontinent were outraged and insulted, as the Simon Commission, which was to determine the future of India, did not include a single Indian member in it. It hints at the British hypocrisy; they wanted to deny the possibility of independence and continue their rule. But they wanted to show that theirs was the most just administration under the sun. While the defenseless Indians protested the commission in a non-violent manner, they were lathi charged. In this charge, Lala Lajpat Ray, a leader of the freedom movement died.

Another incident called Jallianwala Bagh Massacre is an example of inhuman, beastly, cruel and dogmatic face of the British Empire. In 1919 General Major Dyer suspected a revolt in Punjab. As a precautionary measure, he banned public meetings and gatherings. As a protest to this ban, fifteen to twenty thousand people had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh. The crowd included children, women and senior citizens. General Dyer went there with ninety soldiers out which fifty were armed with rifles. He also took two armored cars equipped with machine guns but they were left outside the park as the entrance gate was not wide enough. The park was covered with high walls and almost all the entrances were closed on permanent bases. The only open entrance was blocked by armed force. Without any warning to the non-violent crowd, Dyer ordered to open fire. The firing continued for almost ten minutes until the ammunition almost exhausted. Thus hundreds of innocent people including women and children were killed mercilessly. The British Empires condemned it publicly but the undercurrent appreciated Dyer and he had become a famous figure in England.

There is a reference to Shahid Bhagat Singh, his deeds and his death sentence. During the protest against the Simon commission Lala Lajapat Ray had died. It was believed that the fatal blow had come from a
Scott. In order to take revenge Bhagat Singh and his companions planned to shoot the Scott. By mistake, they killed John Saunders. In order to protest against Defense of India Act 1915, Bhagat Singh planned to throw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly. The bomb was thrown very carefully to make it sure that no one gets killed or injured. Bhagat Singh got himself arrested. The following trial is believed to be unjust as expected. In the final verdict he was sent to the gallows.

There is a minute description of Dandi March by Gandhiji. It was the time when the nationalist leaders wanted to launch a full-fledged protest against the Empire. The choice of protest against the salt taxation was very significant. The Empire had taxed salt which was a requirement of every one. It generated 8.2% of the British Raj revenue and affected the poorest. During 23 days of the March from Ahmedabad to Dandi, Gandhiji created tremendous awareness among people. When Gandhiji broke the law at Dandi, it unleashed the violence of the Empire. The novel describes British savagery thus:

> Four hundred policemen under the command of six British officers stand guard outside the barbed wires. All morning the volunteers moved in ranks toward the gates; all morning they were savagely beaten by the police, although they offered no resistance. ...three hundred twenty injured, two dead. (Raj, p 389)

The same situation has been brilliantly portrayed in Attenborough’s movie “Gandhi”

The period of Indian independence is marked with communal barbarism involving death of thousands of Hindus and Muslims. There are scattered references to the Hindu-Muslim bitterness prevailing in the country. The incident of Arjun’s death is moving. He is moving among the people with the Muslim Prime Minister. A Hindu mob stops them asking
why a Hindu king was with a Muslim Prime minister. The mad crowd dragged Sir Akbar out and cut off his manhood. While trying to save him, Arjun is also killed. This is a small casualty. There was a nationwide frenzy of inhuman brutality in the late 1940s.

Thus, the novel has three important threads running parallel; women’s predicament in Indian set up; the condition of the princely states; and the oppressive and savage tendency of colonialism. Issues like freedom struggle and communal animosity are byproducts of the cardinal threads of the story. Gita Mehta has done justice to all the three aspects by neutrally depicting both the sides of the coin. It is believed that majority of her readers are from the West. In spite of this fact she has boldly shown the orthodoxy of Indian psychology, severe male dominance, extravagant kings and communal barbarism; on the other hand she has also shown the savagery of colonialism, British hypocrisy, the strength of ancient governing policies and progressive kings dedicated to the subject.