CHAPTER-III

RAJ: A COLOURFUL DEPICTION OF

A YOUNG WOMAN
Chapter-3

*Raj: A Colourful Depiction of a Young Woman*

*On a cold January morning when Jaya was five years old, her father insisted she accompany him into the jungle. The Maharani objected The Maharajah overruled her.*

With these three, short, scintillating sentences, Gita Mehta opens Raj and captivates the reader. These three sentences are crucial to understand the socio-cultural-historical pattern of the novel because they imply that: (i) the novel is going to be about some Maharajah; (ii) Jaya is likely to be at its centre; and (iii) the work may question patriarchal power structure. In that Raj opens up the possibilities to be read as a historical narrative, a colonial/postcolonial novel, and a feminist text. We reach at this resolution of signification not because it has essential historical signifiers or because it reconstructs a 'native' past or analysis the suppression of women's voices. This would be an essentialist view of a work that presents cultural, historical and political implications with acute understanding and perceptive assertions. The pervasive influence of the colonial cultural and political realities on the Indian native’ rulers is an all-too-well-known phenomenon. Likewise, the invisibility of women, the power-wielding impulse of traditional patriarchal society and the dichotomy between the public and the private self-image of the culture have become dominant themes of contemporary women's discourse.

There is no denying the fact that colonial discourse is 'an apparatus of power' and that it tends to impose its own culture on indigenous one, thus distorting
native history. According to a Chilean poet-composer, 'The cultural invasion is like a leafy tree -which prevents us from seeing our own sun, sky stars. Therefore in order to be able to see the sky above our heads our task is to cut this tree off at the roots'. (jara 1984) Obviously it is not possible to cut the tree at its roots but it is possible to negotiate a dialogue with history through revaluation of the local past. While problematizing the notion of history at personal and national levels and juxtaposing it with a traditional sense of history Nis-A-Nis its relationship to existing power systems, Raj offers itself to multiple critical positions. Gita Mehta is restructuring here the historical data and ordering it to a design, plot and sequence. The process requires re-visioning and re-writing tin past 'to make a story.' situate it within the socio-cultural contest India discover meaning and a sense of belonging in her own history. This is a postcolonial position in which the author is granting equivalence and importance to what the 'centre' once called 'margin', and what colonialism called 'native' and hence 'the other'. As; postcolonial writer, writing in a decolonized period, the author has undertaken to re-inscribe her country's past.

In Raj, Gita Mehta draws our attention to one of the most distressing experiences of cultural violence of colonialism. The fifty years that she depicts - 1897 to 1947 - was historically a period in which the country was fortified by an undeclared but obvious entanglement with imperialism and the native India that existed within the British India was as troubled and the rulers were as hapless and hopeless in the strangle-hold of the British power politics as the masses in the imperial British India. Fear psychosis had gripped the nation including the native kingdoms. Pandit Nehru describes the anxiety-ridden sections of the entire society before the emergence of Gandhi on the political scene thus:
'The peasantry were servile and fear-ridden; the industrial workers were no better. The middle classes, the intelligentsia, who might have been beacon-lights in the enveloping darkness, were themselves submerged in this all-pervading gloom ... . There was no adjustment to social purpose, no satisfaction of doing something worthwhile, even though suffering came in its trail ...' The Raj as and the Maharajahs were no better off. That the Maharajah of Balmer — Jaya's father in the novel — was a frightened man is conveyed by the last line of the 'Prologue': Not until she became a ruler herself did she [Jaya] comprehend that the Maharajah [of Balmer] taught his children the tradition of courage when he was himself a frightened man'.

Fear continues to haunt the rulers till the end of the novel — first it was the fear of displeasing the British and thus of being black-listed or disinherited on smallest pretexts; then there was also the fear of the nationalists spreading their message of freedom among the people in the native States; then came the most important and sensitive issue of merger with the Indian Union. Gita Mehta quotes Sardar Patel's insightful words to form the epigraph to Chapter 71, the last one of the novel, 'The capacity for mischief and trouble on the part of the rulers ... is far greater than could be imagined. Let us place ourselves in their position and then assess the value of their sacrifices'.
For the rulers accession to the Union meant not only complete liquidation of their kingdoms but also obliter ation of identity, which they construed as personal defeat and humiliation. To cite one example from literature, the Maharajah of Begwad in Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes, scared of an affront to his regal dignity should merger become a reality lets himself be attacked by a tiger during a hunting expedition and thus commits suicide. For him it is a better proposition to die a valiant death than to submit meekly. Jaya, on the contrary, is quick to read the signs of time and decides to join the Union. It does not mean that she had no qualms; after all, as a Regent, it was her duty to protect her 'son's kingdom' and safeguard his interest. Like other rulers she too was not willing to hand over her legacy, the oldest kingdom of Sirpur. But she realized that it was futile to fight a losing halt le. The Raj Guru's words come to her rescue, —what is the first principle of Rajniti, Bai-Sa?" and her reply, "the people' , and she gears herself up to give voice to her people as their elected representative.

The novel maps and dramatizes within the fabric of its narrative the important events of the national freedom movement. But unfortunately, freedom comes with an unhappy note. Partition is not the issue in this novel; but communal frenzy that led to inhuman brutalities is. Even the remote [fictional] state of Sirpur in the north-east is scorched by partition violence. Jaya's young son and the Prime Minister of Sirpur State, Sir Akbar are killed by the violent mob of fanatics 'demanding to know why a Hindu king was traveling with a Muslim'. The irony is that this incident takes place much before partition is to be finalized and Jaya shudders to think 'What would happen when the British Empire's boundary lines for the two new nations became public knowledge'. Within this framework Gita Mehta weaves the story of Jaya. The
'public domain — both at the national level and the state level — was beset with anxiety, fear, death and desolation; the private domain of Jaya was no better, it was full of uncertainties, deaths and dejection. The author has interwoven the political and the personal so intricately that the work goes much beyond the scope of being a historical record of our freedom struggle or a racy account of the grandeur and frivolity of the exuberant princes. Raj presents a deeper perspective on colonialism, feminism and historicity when read in the context of postcolonialism and postmodernism.

How does one read the novel from its multiple critical positions? This question is best answered if we approach it as a woman's saga of success. What distinguishes Raj from some other works dealing with the princes is exactly this angle, i.e., the woman's angle which gives it a new dimension. There are a number of works on the erstwhile native kingdoms, notable among them being E.M.Forster's *The Hill of Devi* (1933), Mulck Raj Anand's *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes* (1963), Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb*, (1977) Nayantara Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity*. Of these, the first three are of the by male authors and the focus in on the male world Maharajas; women have but peripheral existence in these. In Kamala Markandaya's novel women play an active role though it is prince Rabi's story. Nayantara Sahgal in Mistaken Identity is wholly preoccupied with her male protagonist Bhushan because it is the story of his vindication. Gita Mehta presents Jaya's story — a princess thrown into the fray by a relentless fate that snatches away her brother, father, husband and son, and leaves her to face the realities alone — realities of political situations and personal misfortunes. Jaya carries herself with dignity and accepts the challenges with fortitude.
This is the quality of Raj that critics appreciated almost unanimously. gaj is a saga, says Anima Amin 'not only of a country's struggle for independence but of a woman's battle to claim her rights both as an individual and as the head of a State'. Calling it 'a success story that reads almost like failure', N.K. Jain avers that 'Jaya responds to change in her personal and political life with surprising openness and resilience and manages to hold her own in the male-dominated world.' Another critic opines that when Jaya moved to the centre of power from the periphery of the political/patriarchal structure she 'handled the slippery political situations ... with great tact and skill,' drawing her strength from the tenets of Indian culture. As a woman, Jaya is a pleasant mixture of tenderness and strength; as a ruler she displays acumen and courage. After all, her father's foresight in training her to face 'fear' with boldness and his efforts to induct her into `Rajniti' do not go in vain. He used to tell his children — Tikka and Jaya — 'Rulers are men and men are always frightened. A man cannot govern unless he confronts his own fear.' In Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes, Maharajah of Begwad exhorts his son Abhay Raj, 'It is most important not to squeal, to show hurt. Be a man, my son.' These words do not refer to the male or the female; they allude to the human psyche.

It would be of interest here to see how Raj compares with some of the earlier novels on the theme of the Indian princes. Kamala Markandaya's The Golden Honeycomb deals with a long period in the life of one kingdom — Devapur and its three rulers, whereas Raj tells the history of two separate kingdoms — Balmer in Rajasthan and Sirpur in the north-east, joined by one protagonist — Jaya. Raj handles the political situation in the country from the angle of the rulers and does not concentrate much on the fiery period of the freedom struggle from outside the
kingdoms although there are allusions to the nationalists of all beliefs — those who subscribed to Gandhiji's non-violence and those who did not, and also to the period when the country was seething with anger and resentment against the British and was enthused with patriotism. In fact, these events intrude into the narrative via the rulers and through those like Mrs. Roy or Arun Roy who frequent their kingdoms. On the contrary, in Nayantara Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb*, the protagonists are made a part of the nationalist movement despite their royal backgrounds. Rabi feels one with the commoners when he is saved and nursed to health by Jaya, a mill-worker. Bhushan sees human goodness during his jail years and learns to look at the common man with respect.

This may be taken as a hint of the approach of democracy. Or this may also be the 'big story' of modern India as Makrand Paranjape points out. This story is the story of our growth as a nation and like all big stories it has many key themes such as unity in diversity, our multiplicity, our response to the postcolonial situation, partition, independence, and many more. Some of these issues are taken up in Raj directly or indirectly — directly when the native rulers are affected by them, like the colonial attitude of British Imperialism, westernization, independence, democracy and communalism; and indirectly, by the treatment the novel gives to nationalism, partition, and socialism. We come across these through Jaya's story of growth which is also the story of India's growth.

Predictably, Jaya's development has different dimensions — as a daughter, princess, wife, mother, friend, ruler and above all a woman, but somehow the novel is disillusioning at the level of development of human relativity. Human relationships —
person to person and person to society are two major concerns of a creative writer and Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and many others consider interpersonal relationships of great significance in a work of fiction, the failure of which lands the characters in trouble and give a writer canvas to portray or solve those troubles. In one of her interviews Shashi Deshpande asserts:

*Human relationship is what a writer is involved with. Person to person and person to society relationship -- these are the two primary concerns of a creative writer and, to Inc the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation is with interpersonal relationships and human condition.*

This failure of Raj to build bridges across persons and situations may be because of the setting of the novel and the anxiety of the author to highlight aspects like the political tensions, the distance and difference in social situation of rulers and the common man, and many more external factors. Even Sahgal's Mistaken Identity has this limitation. On the contrary, Markandaya's novel is a 'fine mixture of historical realities and fictional setting. It shows [her] subtle art in handling the characters and situations and reveals her deep insight into human relationships.' Moreover, women play a significant role in moulding Rabi and though they are not given centre-stage, they have strength of character enough to draw Santha Krishnaswamy's attention who opines that in portraying her strong characters and able women, Kamala Markandaya 'opens up newer, mature frontiers by stressing the importance of filial and conjugal life.' All these novels record personal histories but they are also political novels with the history of colonial India. Written in the postcolonial era, they transfer some of the
contemporary epithets to the earlier times and leave us wondering if the authors are not seeing the past in the light of the present. Whatever be the case, it cannot be denied that Raj gives us a new perspective to understand the history of our princely kingdoms and principalities from a woman's point of view.

Raj is a third person narrative presented through Jaya's consciousness. The omniscient narrator picks up the threads of the then existing political/historical conditions and guides us through Jaya’s life from her birth, approximately in 1901 to the time she fills m her papers for elections. When the privy purses were abolished in 1971, we imagine that Jaya could be around seventy but we do not get to know her reaction because the "Afterward" merely documents the event and does not make it a part of the story. In the novel the heroine is both a mute observer and an active participant in the events that surround her — a mute observer of the happenings over which she has no control, be they political whereby the princes were I stripped of their power, or human whereby her husband and the other princes invited their own downfall by their excesses and vagaries; she is an active participant in life-situations when she foresees the coming crisis and acts with dexterity to forestall the conflicts or troubles that were latent in the existing politico-cultural order of the times. She accepts change with a modicum of flexibility without being self-destructive like Mulk Raj Anand's Maharaja Ashok Kumar or revengeful like Malgonkar's Abhay Raj. This in itself is an indication of the strength she is invested with.

Through this deftly controlled and ingenuously patterned narrative, the author has re-written a significant period of India's colonial history. As a postcolonial writer, Mehta has the advantage to look back and recapture the past with a renewed vision;
she can interrogate the imperialist history and situate the historical in the socio-
cultural-political space. When a fiction writer attempts to comprehend his/her past and
undertakes to reconstruct the historical events in fictional form, the 'portrayal of
history becomes a project of understanding the present.' The project, in fact, is also
to keep alive the historical memory this desire is generated not so much from the wish
to narrate the collective history that has been lived through but more so from the need
of the knowledge of what had not been lived through. The past justifies the present. In
the case of a diasporic writer the urgent need is not to lose the past because along with
this loss goes the loss of space. 'Write' says a Spanish author, 'in order to remember',
and remembering has a positive dimension because it reconstructs and wards off
discontinuity. Moreover, by recovering history, one becomes a part of that history.
Probably, this is a revivalist attempt to assert continuity. Once, talking about the
significance of past to the present, A.K. Ramanujan asserted in an interview that one
cannot isolate the past from the present because both are connected:

> Because you cannot entirely live in the past, neither can you live
> entirely in the present, because we are not like that. We are both these
> things. Either the individual past or historical or cultural past. It is
> with us, it is what gives us richness of what you call it — the richness
> of understanding, and the richness of expression.\(^{15}\)

History, coloniality and the diasporic experience lends Gita mehta a rich
domain to revise and reconstruct the past; in the process she charts out a fictional
world for the female identity to be incorporated in it. According to Juliet Gardiner,
history and liter-ature both require a negotiation of 'observation, memory and
imagination’. Gardiner further clarifies that the 'historical reality is a special case of fiction as speech is a special case of writing ... and nature a special case of culture.'

It is often argued that a woman gives feminine perspective to history. So, how do we read when women write history? Is it from the angle of feminization? But then, will it not be a limited purview? These questions have been answered convincingly by Jasbir Jain in "Post-colonial Realities: Women Writing History". She posits that feminization of history does not connote any derogatory sense; rather it signifies that in writing history women give 'centre-stage' to the marginalized and try to free history from hegemonic control. This brings it closer to the actual happenings. Jain also explains that in the postcolonial situation, writing historical narrative denotes an attempt to interrogate the past, seek explanation and 'to reclaim an autonomous identity.'

What she says is relevant to our reading of Raj and hence I quote her further:

*The term feminization is not being used to indicate a personal, feminine response to history, but as an attempt to free history from purely masculine pursuits, from hegemonic structures, from an ideological thrust, and to bring it closer to the actual happening which work in several diverse directions and cannot easily be accounted for by a cause-and-effect explanation. It also seeks to subvert the conventional idea of feminization as passive repro-duction of knowledge. Feminization here implies a new awareness of Power relationships, a surfacing of the hitherto marginalized voices and a widening of historical imagination.*
The salient points of this discussion can be summed up thus: Feminization of history means (i) giving voice to the marginalized; (ii) freeing history from ideology; (iii) taking it out of hegemonic control; (iv) generating a new awareness of power relationships; and (v) understanding the social dislocation of social relationships.

Commensurate with the above assertion, Raj concentrates on the history of Balmer and Sirpur (the native States) and Imperial British India, and the struggle for freedom from the point of view of a marginalized female — Jaya (we call her marginalized because though belonging to the ruling family, she is still the 'other' in the male dominated set-up). The four books — Balmer, Sirpur, Maharani and Regent — are also the four stages, metaphorically, of Jaya's life. Born and brought up in Balmer, the young princess is trained to be a 'ruler' as also a woman. The training that her father envisaged for her stands her in good stead when fate wills it that she should rule over her kingdom of Sirpur. As a Maharani and later as a Regent, she administers her people with caring touch. Raj Guru's words always stay with her, 'your dharma is protection, Bai-sa. You cannot escape your destiny.' and she does everything with public good in view. With scant faith in Arun Roy were he to be elected from Sirpur, she broods:

*If Arun Roy was elected from Sirpur, what would happen to the kingdom's different tribes and religions? Would he speak for them? Would he give a sympathetic ear to their concerns against the greed of the majority?*
Jaya is concerned for the marginalized of her state. To them she wants to give voice in the new political set-up. Even her attitude to the Praja Mandal activists is one of understanding and sympathy. This etches out more prominently when we read it vis-à-vis Malgonkar's The Princes, in which the Maharajah and after him Prince Abhay Raj are unable to accept the Praja Mandal in their kingdom. Even the author (Malgonkar) seems to have secret sympathy for the rulers. He paints Kanak Chand as a dubious character, with readers too cannot empathize, and thus Malgonkar successfully avoids giving 'centre-stage' to the marginalized.

Two recurring signs that endorse women's strength and rulers' duties are the ballad-singers singing of the valiant Queen Pushpavati and the Raj Guru elaborating the principles of Rajniti, respectively. Queen Pushpavati is acclaimed as 'the greatest queen in India, famed for her prowess with the sword.' The ballad-singers appear on all important occasions in the kingdom and sing the praises of the legendary queen. The Ballad runs thus:

Two thousand years ago the great Queen Pushpavati was all that remained of the sons of the Sun.
Her father, her brothers, her husband, all her great line lay slaugh-tered in the City of the Hundred Temples.
Queen Pushpavati The greatest queen in India Famed for her prowess with a sword Waho could draw a bow almost as well as a man Who rode at the side of her husband in pursuit of the cheetah This warrior queen was now a widow ... 21
The ballad goes on to tell the long story of how the land came to be called Rajputana because of the valiant queen and her son, and their lineage.

The analogy befits Jaya who has lost all the male members and yet who has to nurture her kingdom like a mother and protect it like a patriarch. The Raj Guru anoints her with a blood-mark on her forehead, and reminds her to protect her people. Major Vir Singh's observation is meaningful at this point, 'I see that the man who anointed your father a ruling king has now anointed you a democrat, Bai-sa. The passage of time and the changing perspective of the nation are revealed when one compares the two situations. Long back, in 1897, it was the birth of Tikka, heir to the kingdom that was announced with the booming of thirty-nine cannons; now, in 1949, the birth of a democrat (Jaya) is announced by an elephant trumpeting from the distant corrals. The Raj Guru is keen that Jaya should use the knowledge he had invested in her, the knowledge that the first principle of Rajniti is the welfare of the people:

*What is the opening lesson of Rajniti, Bai-sa?* "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 priest, the tolerance of great republics. Things go wrong only when men forget the first principle of government. The people."
The understanding and acceptance of traditional Indian principles of governance heralds a new beginning for Jaya. Interestingly, at the end of the novel Arun Roy and John Osborne argue each claiming credit for having taught democracy to the rulers. Osborne remarks as Jaya signs the election papers, 'Congratulations, Bai-sa. It was the dream of the British Empire to teach the princes of India about democracy.' Arun Roy counters him, 'What did the British Empire know about democracy? ... we have taught the Indian rulers that lesson.' Jaya is amused at their naivety in putting across their tall claims and taking credit for something that has always been the part of Indian polity and jurisprudence. Remembering Raj Guru's words Jaya laughs loud and clear, and her laughter merges with the silver waters of the river.

The 'laughter' is an indication that there is no sense of loss or rancor in Jaya. Just as her joy rolls 'across the Sirpur Law Courts and the narrow lanes of the bazaar' to join the river, her kingdom has joined the Indian Union for greater good. The novel ends on a happy and optimistic note, but the author is not quite sanguine about it. In the "Afterward" she expresses her disappointment at the abolition of privy purses; we do not know if Jaya too would have reacted as the author does but if Gita Mehta's words are to be taken as an indication, it was a betrayal, a breach of faith. May be the rulers were not in favour of merger; may be their contribution to the freedom struggle was negligible (they had their reasons) but they did sacrifice their identity by agreeing to merger. Sardar Patel understood this and he assured them security. Gita Mehta draws our attention to these facts:
Disbanding 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.\(^{26}\)

In recognition of their sacrifice, the government had reaffirmed the agreement between the Indian Union and the kingdoms. At that time, Deputy Prime Minister had said, '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.'\(^{27}\) Ironically, what began on a democratic note comes crashing down and by 1971 it is substituted with a re-enactment of colonial diplomacy and power politics of imperialism.

Democracy has different connotations to different people in the novel. To high-profile leaders like Gandhi, Sardar Patel and others, it means a great national achievement with a vision for a bright future: to the native rulers it brings in fear and anger of an uncertain future: the unscrupulous leaders like Arun Roy (or Kanak Chand in The Princes) look at democracy as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement and to the common masses to whom it is supposed to give 'voice' it has scant utility. The words of the senior ballad-singer whose troupe has again appeared to sing of Queen Pushpavati are meaningful:

*Now we have heard that we are all kings. We have been told our voices will carry the same weight as the voice of our anointed ruler.*
Such news has made us happy. But know this. No ruler's voice has ever carried the same weight as ours. Our voices tell of generations that have risen and fallen like the shifting sand dunes of this harsh land.

Without us, deeds and lives would have long since been blown away, like dust in a desert storm, and proud men would not have been humbled by the greatness that has preceded them.\textsuperscript{28}

In the traditional set-up the bards have given meaning and continuity to the kings and kingdoms. They are the preserver of records: they are our oral historians who forge the connecting link between the past and the present. When they are told that they have a 'voice' in a democratic set-up, they do not understand its significance; they do not know what to do with this new power. Probably they have a point here if we take into consideration the fate of the Poor in independent India even after more than half a century. Let us digress a little here. In \textit{Snakes and Ladders}, Gita Mehta encounters a young rag-picker who proudly tells the author that he was a 'Bhat ... the community of bards who once held mythic power over Kings (Snakes and Ladders: 37)\textsuperscript{29}. This is what has happened to our democracy, Gita Mehta laments. However, she is not the only one to force our attention to experiences that are a repetition of the colonial dictum of oppression. Naipaul is filled with a personal sense of defeat and humiliation in \textit{An Area of Darkness} and in his other works at the shattered dreams of democracy. Thus, in the Political and economic dislocation practiced during the postcolonial period do we see the reversal to colonial ideology. The colonial episteme is maintained by a reiteration and repetition of the historical specificity, which has generated skepticism.
The rhetoric of the novel suggests that the impact of imperial and colonial ideology on the native rulers was essentially crippling. The British political doctrine of difference and inequality, of cultural and economic exploitation and the deployment of diplomacy based on the principle of fidelity to the British produced complicity that confused the native rulers, created ambivalence and rendered them impotent, inert toy rulers. The aim of the Imperial strategy was to transform the princes and their traditional culture in order to establish a new one based on the concept of 'superiority of the western culture'. That the princes fall a prey to the designs is reiterated through the examples of Tikka, Prince Victor and Pratap. Those rulers, who show unwillingness to send their sons to England for education, are threatened with dire consequences; those who like the Sirpur princes are given to sensuous life are admonished. Either way they are trapped by the dominant ideology of the Imperial power.

Edward Said's definition of imperialism and colonialism may be of some relevance here. 'Imperialism' he says is 'the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory.'30 Both imperialism and colonialism thrive on the notions of superiority and inferiority and are impressive ideological formations' that assert that certain countries or people are 'subject races' and require domination. The Indian native rulers were subjugated tactfully by both imperialist tendency of the British and their colonialist approach to implant Maharajah of Balmer was almost forced to send Tikka England for higher education. As Kuki-bai reveals to Jaya, the British do not trust the
Maharajah, 'Sometimes your father has no choice. Mar, years ago, Balmer needed money during a terrible famine and your father went to the Tsar of Russia for help. Now he is no longer trusted by the British Raj. The new Viceroy says that if Tikka is to remain heir to the Balmer throne he must go to England.' 31

The Maharajah is enraged at this injunction of the British. He expresses his anger and fear in words having a clear ring of revolt against the British policy of subduing the rulers. It also shows the fear of the alien education and atmosphere on his young son. The novelist saves Tikka from ruining himself like the Sirpur princess Victor and Pratap, because of his early death but there are instances in the novel to prove that Tikka too was getting distant from the traditions of his land. English education exposes him to writers like Kipling, Burke, Baden-Powell and Macaulay. They give him vision which he is too young to put to practical use. He understands that the British look down upon us as "natives" and they practice discrimination on the colour of skin, yet he plays to their tune. The west, particularly England, symbolizes progress with the under-ground railway that ran beneath the city of London', the factories manufacturing car and aeroplanes, and the explorers racing to the two poles.32 On the contrary, life in Balmer is primitive:

Tikka did not know how it had happened, but the Captain's presence diminished Balmer. With a deepening sense of disloyalty, he regarded his father as a ruler blind to the advances of the real world outside the orders of his kingdom. He avoided his- mother, embarrassed that he now saw her as a woman steeped, in the superstitions of the harem. He despised himself for despising his
parents and desperately wanted the Angrez tutor to acknowledge that he was not like them.\textsuperscript{33}

What Macaulay had foreseen was coming true. These were the ‘mimic’ men who talked in the 'master's' tongue but were not his equal; who could see the weakness of their own culture but had neither the will nor the means to rectify it. This is what Fanon calls the ‘perverted logic’ of colonialism:

*Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and and emptying the native's head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.* \textsuperscript{34}

The British Government had contrived many ingenuous and subtle schemes to keep control over the ruling princes. Scheme like gun-salutes, decorations, and conferment of honour pleased the rulers but conversely these generated rivalries among, them, each vying to have an upper hand over the other. This in turn gave rise to sycophancy, cringing and fawning before the Englishmen. If somehow a ruler offended the British masters, he had to lace the humiliation of being degraded by several seats in the Darliar, quently, the Rajas and Maharajas spent their energies and money in futile attempts to keep the English humoured and thus neglected their people. With nothing to do for/in their kingdoms most of them whiled away time and money in useless pursuits and landed in misery. Diwan Jarmani Dass's book
Maharaja, is a revealing account of the debauchery, dissipation and drunkenness of the Indian rulers during the pre-merger period. As the Diwan of Patiala and Kapurthala Jarmani Dass had seen 'deepest low of inhuman lust and their wild eccentricities'. This was almost all over India except perhaps a few kingdoms where the rulers were upright. Gita Mehta depicts the Maharajah of Balmer as one of the ideal kings. To take some other instances from literature, we have towards the low-side Maharaja Ashok of Mulk Raj Anand; Bawaji II and Bawajiraj In in Kamala Markandaya's The Golden Honeycomb, and Ithushan's father (the self-styled "king" of Vijaygarh) in Sahgal's Mistaken Identity.

The condition of Sirpur was no better. With Victor squandering money on the American actress and Prince Pratap entangled in the Esmee Moore affair the State was constantly under threat of being disinheritied. It was Jaya's ingenuity that saves Sirpur. Later, when Pratap was to be officially coroneted, it became a gala event particularly because of the Viceroy's decision to attend the ceremony, singular honour, bestowed in recognition of the Sirpur ruling family's unwavering loyalty to the British Empire.' All the rulers flocked to Sirpur to pay obeisance to the Viceroy. This was height of sycophancy and degradation. Not only in the novel but in real life situations the rulers made themselves ridiculous when they vied with each other in 'canvassing for honours and decorations from the king Emperor and used all means to secure them.' The Political Department and the Viceroy took advantage of the situation created by the 'whims and idiosyncrasies' of these rulers.

Caught between the imperialist colonialist forces on one hand and the traditions of governance on the other, scrupulous Maharajahs like Jai Singh felt
furious at the impossible situation they were in — they were suspected if they adopted welfare measures for their people, they were warned if they wanted their sons to study in India, and they were subjected to discrimination in England. On one occasion Maharajah Jai Singh resents the British prejudice even in as innocuous an activity as cricket which should have nothing to do with politics. He makes his resentment known to Captain Osborne in no uncertain terms, 'you told my son cricket illustrated the British ideal of fair play, Captain-Sahib. Why is my son not in the school team when he is better cricketer than his fellow students? Captain Osborne gives a lame excuse saying that it could be because of the school boys who are often cruel to their classmates. At this the Maharajah throws facts at his face, 'Unfortu-nately, my son's exclusion was not brought about by the cruelty of children but by school rules which prohibit a native from equal participation in school activities. Rules that are similar to the practices of the Empire, wouldn't you say? On another occasion Maharajah Jai Singh is present when the Raj Guru is teaching Jaya the tenets of Rajniti — Saam, Daan, Dand and Bhed and in utter dejection he parodies the original meaning thus:

Saam, I tend my people, putting their survival above the vanities of an empire, and I was called seditious. Daam, 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.
In his despair the Maharajah bursts out in anger at the British tactics of usurping native kingdoms — Udaipur's mints are in British possession; the Maharajah of Baroda has been warned and instructed to ban Mazzini's books; Balmer is forced to send his son to England; in Manipur and Rewa things are threatening; in the south, thrones tremble because their kings dare to be progressive. In fact, all over India rulers are in a state of fear as their ancient lines are replaced by lackeys.  

The Maharajah breaks the toy soldiers in the Billiard Room. 'Why waste time playing games of war?' he says when the rajahs and the maharajahs are just pawns in British hand. That they are pawns is reiterated often in the novel. Speaking to Maharajah Dungra in London, Jai Singh remarks, 'The proudest warriors in the world have become toy soldiers to decorate British parades.' Even in Malgonkar's The Princes, the Maharajah of Begwad always talks proudly of his Lancers and Cavaliers, 'the Bedars have always been soldiers,' he reasserts but in his heart he knows how powerless the rulers are in the hands of the British. That the native kings were living in a make-believe world is vouchsafed by naïve remarks like those of the Maharani of Balmer, “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” ; or when the Viceroy consented to attend Prince Pratap's coronation to formally recognize Maharajah Pratap's 'ruling powers.' It is ridiculous how the entire machinery — the Viceroy and the Sirpur ruler — is out to show the power of the Rajas and the Maharajas on a grand scale when in reality the rulers are puppets with strings in British hands.
Gita Mehta brings out the futility and ridiculousness of elaborate ceremonies like the coronation of Prince Pratap. The ludicrous is subtly put across thus: on the day of the religious ceremony the Dowager Maharani points to 'a square object covered with red silk and whispers, The Sirpur gaddi'. In fact, the so-called 'gaddi' was so disintegrated and fragmented (like the rulers themselves), that it was just an apology for the throne. Two other incidents require mention. One, after the ceremony the Raj Guru presents the Sirpur sword to the new Maharajah, "This sword is the final power of the sovereign, the symbol of justice. But there is no justice without dharma, and the dharma of a king is the righteous service to his people." How hollow are the words like dharma, justice and power! What significance can they have when the rulers are prostrating before the British throne? These facts impinge on the reader with impunity. The second incident relates to the exposition of dharma:

*Take heed, O sovereign. First, there is the People.*

*May you be zealous in performing your duties.*

*May you give in just measure.*

*May you be humble in the presence of the wise.*

*May you be learned. May your presence have dignity.*

*May your zeal be tempered by humanity.*

*May your union with the people be as the union between the Goddess and the Ascetic.*

These ancient tenets practiced across the land, in this case from Balmer (west) to Sirpur (east) are myths, far from the lived reality. With the vantage point of her postcolonial situation, the author subverts such passive regurgitation of rituals.
The rulers are no longer free to administer justice, nor are they potent enough to rule their people with 'dignity'. In fact, by the curious logic of the colonial psychology, they are frightened: as much of losing their traditions, as of being victims of colonial violence. Ashis Nandy calls it the psychological fear of failing a victim to 'a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter.  

The native rulers are in a situation of double bind: on the one side is the imperial power (their rulers), on the other, the awakened segments of the public like the Newspaper men, the reformists and the Nationalists (the ruled). Fear stalks Maharajah Sirpur too and it recoils on their marital life. Jaya understands her husband's fear psychosis, 'more Maharajah Pratap prostrated himself before the British Empire, the more he hated his wife as the symbol of that empire's power over his private life ...' The British were following Machiavellian tactics in liquidating the rulers. They would advance them loans and encourage them to spend it as they wished but soon they would extract the price; it may be in any form — allegation of excesses, threat of disinheriance or submission. They would play court intrigues by backing up rival claimants to the throne or create belts of friendly powers to counter each other. As a child Jaya could not understand her father's fears, but now she is able to gauge her husband's fright, because he had been a willing victim of colonial designs, and Jaya herself is insecure as if standing on slippery grounds.

Paradoxically, Tiny Dungra addresses Jaya as 'the fearless Princess'. But we know how fear pervades her life — fear and the agony of a rejected wife; fear for the safety of her husband and her son (when they are ill); fear that the Imperial power, knowing Pratap's excesses and moral laxity may grab Sirpur, fear that the Nationalist
sentiments may sweep through her kingdom. Despite this, Jaya does not appear helpless; somehow she carries herself with decorum and tries to solve the problems with political acumen and personal strength. Neither as the 'colonized' ruler nor as the 'colonized' woman in patriarchal power structure does she appear weak. Ashis Nandy may approve of her portrayal because he does not accept the colonized as 'the gullible, hopeless victim of colonialism caught in the hinges of history.' 48 It is in human nature to fight our individual battle for survival, each in his / her own way. The various Rajas and Maharajas (in real life situations as well as in the novel), have evolved survival strategies like sweet talk, silence, helping the Nationalists on the sly and so on. Some of them like Maharajah Jai Singh toe willy-nilly the line set for them by the British. Maharajah Jai Singh is not happy is clear from his answer to Dungra's question as to what he thought of the imperial masters: 'What does it matter what I think Hukam? I have no army to give weight to may views.' 49 Nevertheless, they all knew that there was no way out but to evolve some tactic so as to survive. Years after this conversation, Jaya decides to play Polo with the Prince of Wales to impress him and to save the kingdom (Of course, she has other motives too, which we shall take up later). Even Lady Modi is taken by surprise at this change. “Well, darling to go straight from Purdah to a Polo game in front of the Prince of Wales! ... . You are about to become a legend.”50 Jaya becomes almost a legend; the Prince of Wales thinks her goal was the best in the game51; she gains Dowager Maharani’s approval and her husband's confidence — a far more significant achievement for a purdah woman.

Prince Pratap is happy that he has finally got consent from the Prince of Wales to travel abroad. He wouldn’t have done that if you had been hidden in the Purdah Palace, covered with henna,’ he tells Jaya and adds, "Since you seem to received the royal seal of approval, I suppose it’s safe to display you in Calcutta ...'. As
if his callous remarks, reducing her to an object of display are not enough, he makes his intention clear, 'now, I'm going to enjoy myself at last' and he hurriedly leaves her for more pleasures. She is distraught. Her condition can be understood as she hears the 'mournful melodies of the flutes' coming from the river side. But the novelist does not want her protagonist to be mournful and depressed. Jaya must recognize her inner strength. And the Sirpur Prime Minister’s meaningful parting words underscore the importance of her own power. She could wield power over her husband, if not at emotional level, at the level of more practical issues of material gains. '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.' It is then that Jaya decides to turn the key in her favour.

Here we come to the most significant question of the discussion — Java as a woman. Admittedly, Gita Mehta is not a feminist writer, nor does she claim to portray women's problems. Despite this it is a woman-centred narrative. Jaya has all the problems that a woman may have — a callous, uncaring husband, insecurity, loss of all male members of the family and a restrictive social order. Add to this an eiriv marriage to the man in absentia whom she could never love and who in turn never accepted her. Java's condition as a woman can be surmised by the letter published in \textit{The Bombay Chronicle}, a copy of which Mrs Roy sends her. The letter writer's agony is hers too. The letter chronicles the anguish of a rejected wife. It opens with self-justification and a tone of self-flaggration it will seem strange that a person from my class should seek the help of the public — and that through the agency of a daily paper; but there are limits to human patience and suffering.\footnote{arid after recounting her problem the letter-writer points out, '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.' She further asserts, 'I want my status to be regularly defined. I want to fight for the many voiceless women who are being ill-treated. We have no rights. I want my rights.'

Although we sympathize with the anonymous Maharani, our interest here is to explore how Jaya manages to guard her self-esteem without making her anguish public. Gita Mehta invests Jaya with opportunities and qualities that very few women of her time could dream of having. Thanks to her father's political acumen and social awareness, she is trained on par with Tikka. Her exposure to outdoor training, her interactions with Mrs Roy and her interest in Tikka's activities give her visibility and boldness. Jaya comes across three kinds of women in her childhood home: British women like Mrs Osborne, the educated Indian woman, Mrs Roy and the traditional women — her mother and the harem ladies/servants. Of these, Mrs Osborne charms her but Jaya understands instinctively that she cannot be emulated. Mrs Roy has strong views about nationalism, freedom and democracy that baffle Jaya. Her efforts to enlighten herself on these issues are forestalled because as a female child in a traditional set-up she has social constraints. Soon, the laws of the royal household are clamped on her and she is relegated to the female quarters. However, these formative influences stay with her and help her when faced with trying situations.

The author provides a convincing view of the restrictive but all the same colourful life in the Zenana. The women's sly and meaningful jokes, their giggles,
Kuki-bai's tales and the excitement of learning 'Solah Shringar', make the atmosphere lively. By the time the princess is ten, Kuki-bai thinks she is 'already a woman.' With the arrival of marriage proposal from Sirpur, 'lava's childhood ends. Soon Jaya realizes 'with an aching sense of loss that she had ceased to be a child.'\textsuperscript{55} She is subjected to the do's and don't's of a patriarchal power structure. Even Tikka, just sixteen, clamps his rules on her: do not speak to the Angrez boy, only speak to the servants, not the ladies, do not ask too many questions and so on. Then, there are the rules of the royal household to be obeyed. As Amina Amin points out `Mehta creates a circle of oppressive forces which impinge on the lives of women like Maharani Jai Singh and Jaya Singh reducing them to pawns in the socio-political game their men-folk play.'\textsuperscript{56} Despite this, Jaya feels secure inside the walls of the Fort. The political atmosphere outside the Zenana is so charged with imperialist policies and the native politics countering each other that Jaya feels 'safe only inside the carved walls of the Zenana, fearful that if she stepped outside the world of women, she would be swept away by the restlessness blowing through the ancient fort like the hot winds that warned of desert sand storm.'\textsuperscript{57} This is indicative of the home/world dichotomy that was to become an important paradigm of national movement, and women's issue.

It is striking how Gita Mehta records the changed climate in which rationalization and reform come into conflict - with the ideology of traditional norms. Three forces run parallel in the novel showing three points of view that define the social and cultural principles for locating the woman's position in the existing colonialists/nationalist set-up. Maharajah Jai Singh is genuinely interested in reforms and is the catalyst for change; people like Raja Man Singh are the representatives of the dominant view upholding Women's subordination to traditional norms; and third,
the typical imperialists/colonialists like Prince Pratap of Sirpur perpetuate an ambivalent attitude toward change as per their self-interest.

Critiquing the socio-cultural aspects of the women's question through the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Partha Chatterjee avers that 'nationalism did in fact provide an answer to the new social and cultural problems concerning the position of women in 'modern' society, and that this answer was posited not on an identity but on a difference with the perceived forms of cultural modernity in the West .... The relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is to be explained not by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political context with the colonial state. This inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of tradition.\textsuperscript{58}

Both Jaya and the Balmer Maharani are governed by the 'inner domain of the traditional culture. The Maharani is not only conditioned by the traditions but she has also internalized those norms. She cannot and does not go beyond the accepted. Jaya is tender and raw, she could have adapted herself to the requirement of the emerging 'new' culture but the traditions hold fast and Jaya is pushed into the laws of the Purdah despite her father's disclaimer that 'his daughter was not to be raised in Purdah.'\textsuperscript{59} For a few years Jaya's early training has a pleasant combination of outdoor activities as per her father's desire and the traditional lessons as per her mother's wishes. From music lessons to Rangoli classes and thereon to the training of managing the royal household
with the Maharani, Jaya goes in the afternoon to English lessons, riding, shooting and polo as also lessons in Rajniti with the Raj Guru. This ends soon, however, when the Maharani decides to take her training into her own hands in a bid to make her a woman. Jaya is twelve and the Maharani is apprehensive that the training her father was giving her would cut her off from her roots. '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.' Incidentally, instead of losing her identity in the women's domain, Jaya develops a balanced personality — she has all the virtues that the culture envisages for women plus self-assertion, decision making and the ability to form a new identity for herself which the colonial politics required. This does not mean, however, that the women's question is solved in the novel. That would be too simplistic to assume. Jaya as a woman has many more dimensions which we can understand only after we see the Maharani's position vis-a-vis her husband and the existing norms of the Rajput royalty.

Maharajah Jai Singh is forward-looking and progressive and above all he is portrayed as genuinely interested in public welfare. When the draught of 1898 turned severe, with no rains consecutively for three years, the Maharajah wanted his wife to come out of the purdah and travel with him across the kingdom to assist in famine relief as some other Maharani's were doing. The Maharani of Balmer is stunned to hear his decree, 'you must break purdah, followed by his assertion, 'Savage times require savage measures.' She is almost paralysed because this would 'destroy a thousand years of tradition.' She is at cross-roads — if she removes her veil, she would be 'like the eunuchs — neither a woman within the protection of women, nor a man in the world of men.'; but if she refuses, she would be disobeying her husband and 'shame
the ruler before his subject.' Removing the veil in a tradition-bound set-up is easy said
than done. It has its repercussions. The Maharajah's argument is hypothetically sound
— since the 'praja' calls him Tappa' (father), she is by implication their mother. Her
dharma is protection of her children. Such idealism, however, clashes unwittingly with
traditions. Her 'naked face' horrified the men who stare at their Maharani in disbelief
and then lower their eyes in shame. On her return from her tour, she is treated as an
outcaste. Her entry into the zenana is forbidden because she has sinned against the
eleven-hundred-year-old history. The Purohits declare that as a polluted woman who
has interacted with the commoners, she has lost her purity and her entry without
purification would pollute the entire zenana. Their argument is steeped further in
patriarchal power politics — the Maharajah cannot be polluted by anything he does
because he is the anointed of the gods. Whereas the Maharani is 'only his wife' and she
carries pollution on her person. Here the words 'only his wife' denote the subaltern
position given to women.

Such hypocritical codes of patriarchal morality oppress women, irrespective
of their status in the society or the royal household. Be they the concubines or the
Maharanis or the Women in the harem, their lot is to satisfy man's lust, uphold his
status and just obey his command. What happens to Jaya is also not much different
from what may happen to any women princess or commoner. Despite her progressive
father's strong reservations Jaya's personal interest has to be sacrificed for the interest
of the kingdom. She is 'given' in marriage to the 'sword' of a man she almost hated.
Though trained as a boy in valour, she is not empowered to protest and she has to
accept her marriage in silence. Her first reaction to Pratap's photograph was sharp —
on seeing the 'heavy lidded eyes and bored smile' on his portrait, Jaya's 'stomach
contracted, regurgitating the sweetmeat, bitter with bile, back into her stomach.\textsuperscript{64} This bitterness stays with Jaya all along. As the Sati-Mata had predicted, her life was not going to be smooth, 'Go towards your fear, child. Only then can you find courage to endure the life that stretches before you, exiled from your sex.'\textsuperscript{65} When the ascetic had called her 'the barren one', the Maharani was upset. But here 'barren' meant that she will be devoid of the joys of marriage. Jaya faces her 'fears' with fortitude and achieves her freedom from the confining limits of patriarchy which makes her, in a way, a historical figure — historical, not because she is a part of the royal history of Balmer and Sirpur and of the colonial history of India, but because she is like the women in the nationalist struggle of her times who appropriated both the feminine values and the masculine qualities. Gita Mehta seems to suggest that emancipation lies in women's ability to reach at a synthesis of the 'inner' and the 'outer' world, the spiritual and the material worlds — something that her mother, the Maharani of Balmer, had achieved.

Going back to Jaya's mother, we see the pathos of her situation. Soon after the Maharajah's death, she is discarded as polluted by her widowhood and hence declared unclean and unfortunate. is revealed when Raja Man heartlessness of the patriarchal society Singh annexes her kingdom and dismisses her almost contemptuously:

\begin{quote}
This 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 ancient scriptures that we
\end{quote}
owe the widow nothing — not the food from our cooking vessels
nor the water from our wells.  

Such humiliation piled on a Maharani whom they called 'mother' acknowledges the hegemonic attitudes. The exiled Maharani stays in the Dungra kingdom in an ashram, engages in social welfare activities and later joins Gandhiji’s Salt March. This is how she achieves her Sati Mata status. In a way the novel here affirms the important role the nationalists played in giving visibility and voice to women and helped in generating consciousness. The Maharani's journey from the inner sanctum of her palace to Gandhiji's Ashram and thence to Salt March is her physical journey from the inner to the outer world; but from another angle, it is her journey from the material to the spiritual domain. Describing the dichotomy generated during the nineteenth century nationalist discourse between the western and eastern views and between the outer and the inner, Partha Chatterjee explains that 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 it is unimportant. The spiritual which lies within, is our true self; it is that which is genuinely essential.'  

although outwardly the Maharani has gone from *Ghar to Bahir*, she has in effect surrendered the material for the spiritual. She is a saint whom they all called Sati Mata.  

Contrary to Safi Mata's (Maharani's) journey, Jaya's journey from Balmer (almost the western end of India) across the vast country to Sirpur (the northeastern end) can be termed as diaspora within the country. Conversely, her journey from girlhood to wifehood and onward to womanhood is her journey of self-affirmation.
Book Two, entitled "Sirpur" is a saga of her lasporic self — rootless, lonely and uncertain. Her entry into the kingdom of Sirpur after her marriage is almost pathetic: sitting with her (absent) husband's sword 'across her knees', she looks out at the ancient, alien land with its variegated vignettes of life totally different from the familiar scenes of Balmer. Life in the Purdah Palace is equally new and foreign. 'To keep herself sane in the strange limbo of being a bride but not a wife,' Jaya would often look up the photographs of Prince Pratap. Time hangs heavy in his absence but little does Jaya know that after his return it will be worse. He comes to home two yeas after the wedding and promptly rejects his wife, "I'm afraid you won't do, Princess. You really won't do at all." He orders her to remove all her traditional decorations, 'wash all that nonsense off your hands and feet. And change out of these Christmas decorations.' The fatal blow to her dignity as a woman comes when he makes clear the nature of their relationship, 'Ours is strictly a marriage of convenience, Jaya Devi. Should a necessity for children ever arise, I am sure we can both rise to our duty, but until then ...' Thus crushing all her dreams, he frees himself of his responsibilities as a husband and pursues his dissipated way of life. Pratap's attitude reveals two points: the corroding effect of the English education on the culture and the traditional male attitude to women.

The Rajas and Maharajas having several wives, a large harem and any number of girl friends was an accepted fact. Raj mentions the dancing girls the Maharaja of Patiala kept and the number of his wives and mistresses. What angers and frustrates Jaya is Pratap's peremptory dismissal of his wedded wife. The empire has instructed me to stay in India. If I am permitted to travel abroad again, I shall have to be accompanied by a wife. That's why I agreed to our marriage. So here we are, Jaya
Devi. You cannot eat quail or wear a sari. You know no languages. Yet through you I must outmaneuver the Empire which forced me into this marriage. Jaya is, ashamed and indignant but she cannot counter him. The irony of the situation is that Jaya with a sound knowledge of four languages and excellent English was of no use to her husband. In the image of a 'good' wife, Jaya had even tried in Pratap's long absence to learn the local Sirpur language to please him. All this is of no avail. Trie man is callous, selfish and blind to his wife's needs.

Jaya accepts the harsh verdicts of her husband with befitting poise and leads her 'barren' existence alone, but she is not meant by the author to slide into oblivion. Gita Mehta gives Jaya the visibility she could not have attained as Pratap's wife but which she gains by her personal abilities. She learns to defeat him in his own game by quickly learning to be 'chic' and 'elegant' in the western style under Lady Moth's guidance; soon she is his companion in clubs and at dinners; she plays polo; goes hunting; travels with him to England; and takes decisions where the ruler himself fumbles. But, all this has a flip side too when we consider how woman is held a pawn to guard her husband's honour. Long back it was her mother, the Maharani of Balmer, who had come out of her veil to help her husband in relief work and to save his honour; now her daughter, Jaya, tears aside her veil to help her husband hoodwink the British into believing that he is an 'improved' man and hence fit for the throne. Whatever the motive, it is the woman who is made to compromise her beliefs.

The strength of the Indian woman lies, traditions aver, in her supposed superiority and spiritual strength. To guard it, women were required to keep the inner sanctum away from outside gaze. In the colonial period this invisibility became a subject of much specu-lation and since the colonizer could not and did not understand
the enigma called Indian woman, they developed different perspectives. There is some truth in what Lady Modi tells Jaya, 'Darling, it is precisely because you are raised in Purdah that such tales are credible to the British. Even Rudyard Kipling wrote that royal women from the Himalayan kingdoms are sold into prostitution. You see, the British never meet you. The Empire has no access to you or power over your lives.'

During the nationalist movement, the Indian leaders recognized the need to educate the woman so that she would 'have some idea of the world outside the home, into which she could even venture as long as it did not threaten her femininity.' Gita Mehta does not portray Jaya as a gendered stereotype but as a female agent, with a voice and a will. Thus by breaking the impasse generated by her situation, the author clearly displays the contemporary Postcolonial strategy to inscribe female subjecthood. Jaya is given her space. She is invested with the power to bargain and she bargains hard: gets herself titled as the Regent should anything happen to Pratap and is saved from the humiliation her mother had suffered. On another occasion she extracts a promise from Pratap that if she played polo with the Prince of Wales she would be exempted from the dance during the dinner. She feels empowered by her assertion. This answers our question raised earlier regarding the motive behind her insistence to play polo.

Gita Mehta wrote Raj in the decade of the 1980s and it was _published in 1989. The author, therefore, has all the advantages of hindsight. She exploits her postcolonial situation and gives Jaya the centre-stage, gives her abilities and intelligence, whereby she gains visibility. As a woman in the traditional culture, Jaya is the marginalized and her husband, the patriarch is the centre, but by the reverse logic of the postcolonial text, it is Jaya who wields real power. Even then, Jaya is the
sufferer. Kumkum Sangari points out in one of her essays that it is problematic to construct the history of female agency because of the difficulty of 'owning' a voice. It calls for a reconstruction of the complexity and historically changing definition of female agency — as it is attributed to women and as it is enacted by women — alongside transitions in notions of female selfhood and individuation.²⁷⁴

Denial of her right to be a wife is an unbearable agony for Jaya. There are occasions when she loses her self control and weeps. Her pain reveals the wound of becoming a victim of Pratap's inebriated nocturnal assaults,⁷⁵ of being an object of his consumption, instead of his companion in tenderness. Hurt is always there: first it is the rejection, then as a mother she is denied the right to feed her baby. She is angry at Pratap's decree that she should not breast feed her child. Having 'robbed her of the dignity of being a wife he was now 'stealing away the rights of maternity.'⁷⁶ Jaya makes it known by her expression, though not by her speech, that his order was unjust. Arun Roy's mock-sympathetic words move her to self-contradictions in her self-image but it occasions a critique of the hegemonic control over the female body which she rejects. This may be construed as her march from the self-sacrificing Indian woman to the self-assertive 'new' woman; or we may give her a long rope and justify her natural human desire or we may interpret it as her vengeance on her callous husband who used her to satisfy his own lust without ever caring for the demands of her body.

The postcolonial/postmodern critics of Raj tend to understand her at human level, and do not doubt her virtue. N.K. Jain explains that Jaya's relations with Arun Roy do not diminish her nor is it inconsistent with her self-image as a true sati. The
event is significant because it shows that Jaya is no ascetic and because it brings her the long denied sexual fulfillment and also because it wipes away the humiliation she had suffered at the hands of her husband". In many earlier novels dealing with the ruling princes the authors have shown and justified the 'moral' failings of the royal women. For example, the Maharani in Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes who walks away with the Muslim Prime Minister of the State of Begwad and Bhushan's mother in Nayantara Sahgal's Mistaken Identity who joins her Muslim Marxist lover in open defiance of traditions are interpreted as positive signs of empowerment. Jasbir Jain calls Bhushan's mother the 'bravest' of Sahgal's women. in both these novels, the women are elderly with grown-up sons; in their situations they show remarkable courage to resist patriarchy and then justify their actions. In Jaya's case, she does not have the need to justify anything to anybody, not even to herself. But naive as it appears, Jaya is singularly unaware that her three-day forays into the jungle with Arun Roy would create scandal, and it does. The British Resident's report to the Political office in Delhi contained full information of Jaya's 'intimate association' with Arun Roy. It angers and shames Jaya — as much for her personal image as for the interest of her state. However, the Jaya-Arun affair seems to be temporary if the ending of the novel is any indication when Jaya shows scant faith in Arun Roy. It is also significant to note that of her two friends — James Osborne and Arun Roy — Jaya is enamoured of Osborne, 'the blue-eyed Angrez boy' of her childhood pity, 'Poor Bai-sa. So many roles to perform and not one of them allow you to be a woman. But perhaps you do not yet kr what it is to be a woman'. Self-pity leads her to self-assertion and in a weak moment she falls a prey as much to Arun Roy's Tal designs as to her own desires. This betrays fundamental dreams. But, they keep a respectable distance and Osborne though friendly and understanding never tries to take advantage of her
liability. It is arguable if Osborne's cautious attitude is anything to do with his notions of racial superiority of the colonizer, or it is due to his duty-consciousness and personal sell-nbstra int. Whatever it be, Osborne appears far more dignified than Arlin Roy. One wonders why Jaya, even after understanding Arun Roy's motives, allows him to get closer, particularly when their relationship has no emotions involved. Is it Gita Mehta's tirade against the hegemonic control over women that objectifies them? Or is the author trying to project the 'new' Indian woman to the west?

In fact, Gita Mehta has attempted to project and explain many things to the west in this novel, for example, the question of sati. In 1987, the Roop Kanwar case had rocked the country and shocked the world. While there were questions and counter-questions and the condemnation games played by the media and the Hindu establishment, some scholars came out with the theory that the recent 'phenomenon of sati shows an ideological manipulation of women,' and it was a political move 'to mobilize support for forging a common identity.'\(^8\) Gita Mehta takes pains to demonstrate that a widow is not unclean or unholy and in progressive states like the Balmer kingdom sati was banned long since. She explains that sati means a 'woman of virtue.'\(^9\), one who can endure and continue even when her world falls around her. The concept of sati runs all through the novel in different forms like the prediction of Sati-mata, the sati prayer that Jaya seems to recite all through her life and the Balmer Maharani's transformation as Sati-mata. The Maharani of Balmer achieves the high status as Sati-mata not because of any occult power but because of her virtuous life which is strengthened by her philanthropic works - the service of the poor and the needy. Jaya recites the sati-prayer daily as a ritual but her concept of virtue is changed. She does not consider herself 'impure' after her affair with Arun Roy. This is an
indication of the approaching social/cultural changes in the national psyche. While the Balmer Maharani, leading a 'pure' life, joins the Gandhian Salt March, her daughter (Jaya), segregating private/personal from political/public forgets the Arun Roy issue and decides to join full-fledged politics.

The sub-text of the novel tackles the woman's question from many angles. That the woman's question was at the core of the nationalist discourse is an accepted fact which colonial studies scholars have considered as vital to the understanding of feminism in India. Raj has three strands running more or less parallel: (i) the condition of/in the native states, (ii) the rise of nationalism, and (iii) the woman's question in culture and in nationalism. Finally, these three strands are joined to the imperial colonial politics with its colonized-colonizer binary. Scholars in the fields of colonialism and the history of women's movement in India have recognized that by introducing the cultural notion of female inferiority, the imperialist forces perpetuated the notion of inferiority of men and thereby of the culture. The colonizers essentially drew upon gender as a tool to further their 'civilizing mission' in India and adopted the 'native' female social reform project to advance their larger imperialist designs.83 Interestingly, seen from another angle, Jaya is the central figure on whom the 'civilizing mission' is carried out: first by her father (who trains her in various aspects of governance), her mother (who makes her an Indian woman), and then her husband (who wants to teach her the 'intricacies of western society'). Life teaches Jaya much more. By the time the novel ends the Balmer princess stands out as a free, self-assertive and self-confident woman of free India.
In the prologue of the novel the writer has declared her idea that she is going to depict historical novel but here also she has emphasized the feminist attitude. The novel is woven around its heroine Jaya, means female is at its centre. The very exposition of the novel shows that work may question the petriachal power structure of our country. In that Raj opens up the possibilities to be read as historical narrative, a colonial / post colonial novel and a feminist text. The author has interwoven the political and the personal of the heroine Jaya so intricaly that the novel goes beyond the scope of being a historical record of our stuggle for independence. Raj presents a deeper perspective on feminism, colonialism and historycity when read in the context of post colonialism and postmodernism.

Mehta has written a big book, not only in size, but in scope; making it a difficult book to summarize and review. The story moves through the various places and roles of Jaya’s life. Each section is full of subplots and fascinating characters, with a few establishing a strain of continuity in her life. I particularly liked the early portions of the book which reproduced the texture and context of life in the kingdom. Jaya’s family was devoutly Hindu and continues that religion’s traditional rituals. Muslims move comfortably in and out of their lives, however, even serving in high governmental positions. As India Today notes on Raj, ‘The best of historical fiction from the pen of an Indian writer.’

The women under veils are the symbol of crushed womanhood but at the same time in the beginning the Maharajah insisted upon taking Jaya to the forest the Maharani under veil frowned in concern is the symbol of a type of rebellion of the woman against the male dominance in the family and society.
Here the novelist has very expertly analyzed the different dimensions of the development of Jaya, she has been depicted as a daughter, princess, wife, mother, friend ruler and above all as a woman with different forces and attitudes of feminism. The character of Jaya is drawn as the women who belong to the ruling family and yet she is marginalized female because she is ‘other’ in the male dominated set-up, and yet as a Maharani and Regent she manages her people with motherly care. She always remembers Rajguru’s words, that her dharma is the protection of her people. Jaya is the concerned for the marginalized of her states. In the novel the author has proved that woman’s questions were at centre of the nationalist discourse.
Notes and References:-


18. Ibid., p.162


20. Ibid., p.460

21. Ibid., p.455

22. Ibid., p.454

23. Ibid., pp.453-54

24. Ibid., p.461

25. Ibid., p.461

26. Ibid., p.462

27. Ibid., p.462

28. Ibid., p.455


67. Chatterjee, Partha. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial*
Histories. Delhi: Oxford, 1994, p.120.


69. Ibid., p.189.

70. Ibid., p.190.

71. Ibid., p.191.

72. Ibid., p.197.


76. Ibid., p.298.


80. Ibid., p.383.

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84. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/review/gita_mehta