… while her intelligence is obvious and her opinions clear, she is ultimately not interested in pressing her political impressions onto her reader, but presents historical facts with gentle persuasion in a beautifully woven tapestry.

Soderberg
Chapter - III

The Treatment of Indian History Dealing with Human Relationships in a Colonial Society

With the establishment of the Indian Writing in English as a new genre of Indian English literature; the great saga of freedom struggle becomes one of the major themes of Indian novels. After independence; it offered a large scope to deal with human relationships in a Colonial and postcolonial society with historical background. It stimulated the imagination of creative writers and enriched them with the useable past. Almost every Indian novelist in English has enshrined in his writing one or the other phase of freedom movement either as the main story or as a background of the story.

Connection between history and man is quite intimate and deep-rooted which has eventually prompted the novelists to write. History as the theme of creative fiction seems different due to various ways of writing. Novels of different shapes and kinds are generated by the novelists’ involvement and handling of history. It sometimes incorporates actual events and people, some novelists reflect interest in history through sufficient evidences and some works express itself somewhere between history and conventional fiction, which categorize novels into documented, disguised and invented historical novels.
These historical novels thus refer to the vast historical reality and also native Indian culture like any of the postcolonial writings. The term “…‘postcolonial’ refers not just to the period after independence but to the whole period ranging from the moment of colonization to the present” (Singh and Kumar 7).

Indian writings are the outcome of interaction between the Imperial British culture and native culture which focus on creative impetus for liberated and positive future of the people. Many novels of such kind are generated by novelists of different times. History and culture are often picked up by them and looked upon as a broad expanse of human canvas, sprinkled with momentous dates and important names.

In modern times, Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World* (1916) presents the issue between the ideas of Western and Indian culture and revolution against it. The story takes place during 1916 in Bangladesh region, ranging from period 1858 to 1947. The plot shows contemporary independence movement sparked by various national and regional campaigns of both militant and non-violent ideas along with early parts of twentieth century. The entire novel centers on the Swadeshi Movement depicting nationalism through rejection of foreign goods.

Another novel of the Indian Revolution which started with the Khilafat Movement and concluded with the independence of India is *Inqilab* (1959) by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas. The novel vividly brings-forth
dozens of momentous incidents that have been engulfed by history. *Inqilab* is full of wonderfully realistic and vivid descriptions of freedom movement. It represents the cross-section of Indian nation through several soul-stirring characters, young in mind and spirit, who broke the fetters of imperialism. On this P.P. Mehta expresses, “*Inqilab* finally turns out to be a powerful novel so realistic that several of the elder readers may perhaps find a reflection of their own aspirations of those glorious days portrayed in these pages” (112).

Novelists like Raja Rao and others produced finest novels under the impact of Mahatma Gandhi and his policies. One of the best known Gandhian novels in English is Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938). It portrays the participation of small South Indian village Kara, of Mysore in national struggle called by Mahatma Gandhi.

Similarly, one more regional novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) by R.K. Narayan weaves the love story of a Malgudi youth amidst the Gandhian Movement of Civil Disobedience; the Quit India Movement and various other independence movements. The story ends with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi describing emotional upheavals of a staunch Gandhian follower.

A sensational literary event took place with the publication of an oversize novel Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) describing Indian political history of six decades. Through the work Rushdie
consciously breaks away the realistic tradition of novel writing and has called for new experimental strategies with historical and cultural background. Narrator’s central concern in the novel is to dramatize the encounter with several dimensions of history. He had mixed public history of country with private histories of individuals and families to reflect the issues related to the subcontinent.

In connection with experimental use of history stands Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). It is a satirical fictional work weaved in the plot of great Hindu epic the Mahabharata. The novelist has used mythological characters; recast and reset in the context of the Indian Independence Movement and the first three post-independence decades. Tapan K. Ghosh writes:

> It covers the period of Indian history from the advent of Mahatma Gandhi as the undisputed leader of the freedom struggle against the British Raj to the Emergency rule of Indira Gandhi, highlighting en route some landmark events like the Champaran Satyagrah, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Salt March, the Quit India Movement, the Partition of India and Independence, the country’s war with Pakistan and China, the birth of Bangladesh and the dismemberment of the land of the Pure, the horror of the Emergency and its aftermath. (55)
The novel has 18 books just like 18 books of the Mahabharata and like the *Battle of Kurukshetra* which lasted for 18 days. Almost every major historical figure has been casted as a part of mythological story to demonstrate the part played by them in Indian independence.

Like the other eminent writers; Gita Mehta too has treated Indian history in her own way. Almost every important realistic incidence between the Imperial British India and Royal India has been dealt with the establishment of various human relationships. In *Raj* Gita Mehta maps and dramatizes major historical events ranging from 1897 to 1950. She has weaved the story of Jaya Devi; the Princess of Balmer around whom revolves the story of freedom movement. The important events dealt with in the story are the famine of 1898, the development of freedom movement in Royal India, Emergence of Gandhi and other National Leaders, chronological freedom struggle, the two World Wars, awakening of the democratic spirit, India-Pakistan partition and finally Independence.

*Raj* can be raised as a saga of triumph – the triumph of democratic principles and of the protagonist, who displays vision of Individual freedom breaking away the conventional norms for the sake of society. The story of Jaya Devi, the Princess of Balmer and the Maharani of Sirpur has been skillfully knitted around historical happenings and her staggering fortune. She faces many turbulences in her life through which the author has provided us with an opportunity to study culture, politics, power, wealth and human relationships in a Colonial society. In the story, changes
occur through a succession of deaths in the family and the changing political realities in the transforming India. Throughout the novel, Jaya Devi remains a mute observer and when the time demands she becomes an active participant to prove her strength and her decisiveness. She even transforms herself according to the political and social changes. Usha Bande remarks, “The novel also celebrates the victory of our perennial principles of Rajniti which our rulers had forgotten but which are inherent in our system of monarchy” (240).

The narrative in the novel begins in the year 1897; the Kingdom of Balmer and other desert kingdom are affected by the severe drought. All water bodies, village wells and the artificial lakes are dry or with sunken level. Balmer, the land which lies beyond the desert is often known as the “Land of Death” amidst Europeans. In the same year the Queen Victoria is celebrating her Diamond Jubilee and the Kings from every part of India and other Colonial countries are preparing to visit London. The author has brilliantly plotted her protagonist in the state of Balmer where the ruler is in defiance of the laws of Imperial Britain.

Maharajah Jai Singh of Balmer after the proceedings and serious discussions decides to visit the Empress, in order to discuss the problems of his drought-stricken state and revenues but the intentions of Britain are dubious. In meeting one of the nobles states:
Maharaj, be cautious. Britain cripples us with her greed. Half of India’s money goes to fatten England. The other half is spent on an army in which no Indian can be an officer. On more railways to move British goods, more police. The Angrez are weaving a spider’s web of power from which we will never disentangle ourselves. \( R 16 \)

At London, Maharajah Jai Singh witnesses the grandeur of Diamond Jubilee procession without any mention of famine. Thus a premonition of doom envelopes Jai Singh and forces him to think: “… India’s wealth was providing a carpet for Victoria’s feet, leaving India no protection from the pitiless sun” \( R 18 \).

On the eve of the Jubilee Parade all the greatest names of India are in the Buckingham Palace to pay obeisance to the foreign Empress. Forty Indian rulers spur their horses behind the carriage of the Empress. This makes Jai Singh to ponder, “… all their shining splendor could not disguise the importance of kings without armies who had been forced to travel thousands of miles to pay homage to an Empress twice untouchable, a widow and a foreigner” \( R 24 \).

Keeping in view of failing monsoon and engulfing famine Jai Singh discusses the problem with an Englishman at India office through an interpreter, a young Indian lawyer. The Englishman bargains in a soft voice and gives veiled threat turning a blind eye to the situation. Through
Maharajah of Dungra the British personnel hands over the shares’ documents of the Canadian Pacific Railway, an Australian gold mine, three banks and a dozen other foreign enterprises.

The Maharajah vowing to guard Balmer accepts the documents and acquires his dharma as a warrior and protector of the people. After this, Maharajah Jai Singh is compelled to think that his visit has been a total failure. Land taxes have not been lessened, fields have become unyielding as rock and the farmers are unable to scratch even their livelihood. Keeping in view Maharajah of Balmer decides to sell his Navratan to the Tsar of Russia. “… so the farmers don’t have to sell their land to the Angrez companies at unreasonable prices” (R 37).

The novelist has also highlighted the progress imposed by the British Empire as a parallel undercurrent for resurgence of United Democratic India. Through compulsion, threat, bargaining and many other means, they introduce Railways, Modern Irrigation Techniques, Telephones, Radio, Planes and other Modern amenities in India. They indirectly contribute to make us united and force us to learn the lesson of democracy.

From the beginning Gita Mehta’s tone has been the challenging changing voice through her characters. The arrival of the British Empire and signing a treaty creates a lot of transformations in the Royal India and its world. The Kings employ English Tutors to learn European mannerisms, their games, their policies and many more. The novelist has
presented her views through Raja Man Singh’s children who adopt the Western way of life and become so westernized that they eat with knives and forks; call their parents mummy and daddy and even they are known by English names, but Maharajah Jai Singh being a great nationalist is forced to opt all these for the welfare of his kingdom and his people. He appoints Captain Osborne who has a distinguished career with the British Indian Army and is a fine polo player.

Arrival of the new Viceroy Lord Harding in place of Lord Curzon and crowning of George V as the Emperor of India changes the prevalent policies and British justice patterns in the Imperial Royal India. Maharajah Jai Singh is compelled to send his son Tikka to England to save Balmer and its heir. On his helplessness he delivers Captain Osborne his thoughts with stern expression mixed with resentment:

Justice! How the Angrez loved that word. We had a system of justice once, Captain. We had laws. But your Empire absorbed our armies, castrated our nobles, confused our scholars, diminished our priests. You deposed the guardians of our laws and left only—what is it you Angrez say? – The Oriental despot. (R 84-85)

To rule under the dictatorship of the British Empire and to obey all unjust orders make our rulers docile and passive. They indulge themselves in flaunting and flattering. In order to please and support the British army,
during World War I, our rulers have raised an army of a million men called as Indian Imperial Services Troops. Maharajah of Balmer is amongst those rulers who are against sending troops simply to fulfil their dharma. He remarks:

Fifteen cavalry regiments. Thirteen infantry battalions. Three Camel Corps, to be used as infantry on the western front or for desert warfare in defence of the Suez Canal. Two mountain batteries. Supporting services of medics and transport units. I need hardly say these contributions are far in excess of the requirements of our treaties. (R 113)

He further says that before 1915, the lancers of Royal India have not been acknowledged for their commitment and valour. They have failed to record and recognize their contribution. The unbending Viceroy, Lord Curzon who had once treated India’s Kings as recalcitrant children, acknowledged Britain’s debt of honour to her proudest Colony. In the war Indian soldiers had been the most affected troops and had struggled hard for their commitment. Outstanding Indian lancers “… live in trenches dug into hard winter mud, sheltering like rats against enemy guns” (R 122). When Germans had used poison gases, soldiers had “… no gas masks and have to cover our faces with handkerchiefs soaked in urine” (Raj 130). When they had encountered severe shortage of arms, they said, “… we are making hand grenades out of Jam jars and firing petrol cans into enemy trenches with catapults. We stuff bits of steel pipes with dynamite to
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blow up the barbed wire-the British soldiers call it the Bangalore torpedo” (R 130). The war proved so devastating that “Men are dying in such numbers that it is a shock to find people still alive” (R 131).

Massive slaughter of Royal Soldiers and betrayal by the hands of erstwhile ruling community conceives favourable atmosphere for spurt of rebels. Rulers of Royal India have started planning to devise a constitution with the help of nationalist lawyer. This is the phase of transition. Great many changes take place. The Maharajah of Balmer is convinced to adopt the machines, factories, railways and the inclusion of common people in state affairs, while drafting the constitution. They discuss about the policies and promises of Great Britain:

For years Britain has promised to make India a Dominion, like Canada and Australia….Britain is setting Hindu, Sikh, Moslem against each other. Royal India against British India. We must not allow this to continue. (R 142-143)

To attain the desired independence, rulers come altogether with Gandhi and his system of non-violence. The Indian rulers favour to demand the Home Rule or self-government to India. In the beginning the movement is in great advance but gradually it dissolves as some accept it and others reject it out-rightly because of passive resistance. Through Raj, Gita Mehta has tried to provide reasons for the same. The rulers reject the
proposal and appear to support Britain to safeguard their thrones. The Home Rule Movement which at a glance reflects failure proves later on the tremendous achievement of creating a generation of ardent nationalists who form the back-bone of national movement in the coming years under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Chronological account of Freedom struggle has been prompted by the novelist from the Royal Proclamation of 1919. In this year King George V, introduces Rowlatt Act which aims at severely curtailing the civil liberties of Indians in the name of curbing terrorist violence. The imposed Rowlatt Act is known as the Black Act of the British Raj. This causes a widespread resentment for washing off democratic establishment and imposition of dictatorial laws. Sixty million Indian Muslims too join hands against infidel Empire after discovering their questioned loyalty during the war. Like political situation, the economic situation too becomes perilous. The disastrous monsoon creates shortage of food-grains but the heartless empire continues to export.

The situation is further aggravated when Muslim leaders call upon all believers to stop working for the British Empire and Gandhi launches a nationwide Non-Cooperation Movement. The situation becomes very explosive, violent speeches are made, violent tempers flare, thousands are jailed and the congregation of more than five is stated illegal. In Punjab, General R.E.H. Dyer the martial law-administrator decrees many
oppressive orders like “… all Indians to crawl on their hands and knees and … all Indians to salaam any person with a white skin” (R 166-167).

On 13 April 1919 a mass meeting is held in Amritsar to protest General Dyer’s ordinance. A large crowd gathers in Jallianwallah Bagh to attend a public meeting. Armed troops surround the walled park and block its only exit. On Dyer’s orders his troop fires on unarmed people, without any warning. Firing continues for ten minutes. Hundreds have died and many are injured but no assistance is rendered to the wounded. The entire nation is stunned by this brutal massacre. In Midnight’s Children Salman Rushdie has also described this event and its brutality as:

The soldiers fired just 1600 bullets that day, Ganapathi. It was so mechanical, so precise; they used up only the rounds they were allocated, nothing was thrown away, no additional supplies sent for. Just 1600 bullets into the unarmed throng, and when they had finished, oh, perhaps ten minutes later, 379 people lay dead, Ganapathi and 1,137 lay injured, many grotesquely maimed. When Rudyard was given the figures later he expressed satisfaction with his men. ‘Only 84 bullets wasted,’ he said, ‘Not bad’. (81)

Like Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor too has incorporated this infamous incidence in The Great Indian Novel under the title Bibigraph Gardens
massacre. After this ruthless incidence the Indian Nobel laureate Poet Raja Rabindranath Tagore returns his Knighthood to the British.

To most Indians, the incidents of 1919 have rendered King George’s proclamation irrelevant and the leaders of Indian National Congress respond it with a new resolution:

\[ This \text{ conference is of the opinion that the Reforms are inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing} \]

\[ This \text{ conference reiterates its declaration that India is fit for full responsible government and repudiates all assumptions and assertions to the contrary. (R 167)} \]

At the end of Non-Cooperation Movement and by the end of 1927 the mass anti-imperialist upsurge begins to take a marked upward turn. The gathering storm is against the Simon Commission and is demonstrating with black flags and shouting slogans, “GIVE INDIA DOMINION STATUS NOW / SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR INDIA / SIMON COMMISSION GO HOME” (R 309-310).

Indian nationalists demand invitation from the British Empire to assess whether the British India is ready for self-government or not, but the Empire denies the demand and even the rulers of Royal India have been asked to appear before the Butler Commission to plead for the rights he has guaranteed by treaty. Unrest and dissatisfaction among all ignite the
spark of struggle and the monarchs gather in Delhi to join hands with the moderates.

On the publication of the Commission report, Delhi erupts in demonstration against the British Raj as from the report the Indians learn to their horror that the British Empire intends to retain its power and self-government is to be delayed for an unspecific time. In April the rage of India finds alarming expression. A revolutionary, Bhagat Singh explodes a bomb on the Viceregal throne in the Legislative Assembly. The bomb is especially designed to do no damage but to create a widespread insurrection. Bhagat Singh defends his action in Delhi courtroom as:

The attack was not directed against any individual but against an institution. We are next to none in our love for humanity. We hold human life sacred beyond words. But freedom is the imperishable birthright of all mankind. For this faith we shall welcome any suffering to which we may be condemned. (R 347)

He is condemned to be hanged and his name is intoned as a mantra of freedom. The rallying masses also start shouting slogans against the toady rulers of Indian kingdoms as, “British toady! Hai! Hai! / British toady! Shame! Shame!” (Raj 348)

Book four ‘Regent’ of Raj starts with the statement of Indian National Congress in 1929. The Lahore Congress has authorized the
A working committee to launch a programme of Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes. They invest Gandhi with full powers to launch this. They issue an ultimatum of 31 January to Lord Irwin stating minimum demands in the form of 11 points. On being ignored the agitators bomb Viceroy’s train but under the wrong compartment. Through Major James Osborne the novelist has tried to focus that all British personnel are not alike but some are exceptions. Major Osborne says, “These natives don’t deserve a Viceroy like Lord Irwin. The man’s a bloody saint—still trying to talk Parliament into holding a Round Table Conference so that Indians can be heard in England by the King Emperor himself” (R 354).

On the first day of 1930, the angry nationalists are eagerly waiting for the rights of self-government and the status of Dominion like New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and Canada but encounter only betrayal by the hands of the Empire. On this Lady Modi prompts Jaya with these words:

They have decided to throw every Englishman out of India. They don’t want Dominion status anymore. They want a republic. January 26 is to be Republic Day. We are all to lower the Union Jack, raise the Indian flag and dedicate ourselves to ending the Empire. (R 361)
Before embarking on Civil Disobedience Movement, Mahatma Gandhi asks the Viceroy of India to pave the way for a conference between real equals through a letter. He writes:

It has impoverished millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinous and expensive military and civil administration. It has reduced us politically to servitude. It has sapped the foundations of our culture….If nothing is done to end the process of exploitation India must be bled with ever-increasing speed. (R 367)

The plan is brilliantly conceived and Gandhi proceeds with his ashramites to disregard the salt law. He starts from Ahmedabad along with his 78 ashram members to reach Dandi covering distance of 240 kilometers. In three weeks Gandhi walks more than two hundred miles and approaches the Dungra border where people are gathered to catch a glimpse of the great soul of India. On his way he addresses masses to abjure alcohol, drugs and British goods. He also encourages people to stop evil practices, to adopt hygiene, to use Swadeshi goods and to practise non-violence.

At Dandi, Gandhi accompanied by Sarojini Naidu walks into the Indian Ocean, kneels and picks up a handful of sand encrusted with sea-salt. On this Mrs Naidu cries “Hail, Deliverer!” (R 373). With the signal of civil disobedience, the whole nation rises against the Empire.
The Viceroy passes a series of ordinances giving the police unlimited rights of arrest. Major of Calcutta, Pandit Malviya, Dr Rajendra Prasad and many more nationalists are imprisoned for disobedience. Nearly, sixty thousand people are arrested within two weeks and Gandhi too is arrested when he is about to March on the Dharsana Salt Depot. Rigorous press censorship is also imposed. On which Tiny Dungra remarks:

God knows what the Viceroy thinks he’s doing….The censoring of nature press has only meant that every incident is known throughout India by word of mouth….And yet by the end of this year, we are expected to attend the Round Table Conference in London like gentlemen, as if what is happening in India were only a game of cricket. *(R 376)*

Observing common men, their valour and devotion to the non-violence, Jaya’s mother expresses herself, “I saw the British beat defenseless men with lathis and rifle butts. They did not cringe. They did not complain. But most important, they did not retreat. Their silent courage made them invincible. The British Raj is finished, Bai–Sa” *(R 378)*.

When the whole nation is participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement and non-violence, there are students, poets and romantic girls who are practising violence under the party name Indian Republican Army and have captured Chittagong. Their victory becomes ephemeral and a
handful of accused youth are sent to the Andman Islands. Under title 1931, Gita Mehta has dealt with unconditional release of Gandhi and signing of the Pact between the duos.

The terms of agreement include immediate release of all political prisoners not convicted for violence, the remission of all fines not yet collected, the return of confiscated land and lenient treatment for those government employees who have resigned. The Congress on its part, agrees to discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement. Explaining this to Jaya James Osborne calms down her anxieties in these words:

We British are not all monsters, Bai-Sa….No Indian has ever been received as an equal by the Viceroy. Half of the England will call Irwin a traitor. But if Gandhi attends the next Round Table Conference and Federation is granted by Parliament, the Empire may soon be packing its bags.

(Raj 386)

Like Major Osborne Mrs Naidu too appreciates Lord Irwin’s benevolence, “India is blessed with two Mahatmas, hukam: Gandhi and Lord Irwin” (R 387). Before the Round Table Conference an ugly battle starts between the National Congress and the Muslim League, which proves to be the beginning of Hindu-Muslim communal antagonism. Lady Modi states her views on the Round Table Conferences and its impact:
The magnificence of the Princes dazzled everybody at the first Conference, and Gandhi’s knees certainly overpowered them at the second. But all this Hindu-Muslim business ruined the third Round Table Conference. In fact, without the Maharajahs or Gandhi to hold their attention, no one in England is interested in India any more. (R 393)

This is the period of political and social upheavals. Hindu-Muslim riots flare up everywhere. Jaya painstakingly constructs to keep Sirpur intact. The Reformers start demanding democratic elections in every kingdom and their demands grow more vociferous with jail and exile of them.

In 1935, the Princes of Indian States are scared with the thought of the end of Royal India. There are no giants in the Chamber of Princes capable of persuading fellow rulers to group the power held out of them. In August 1935, the British Parliament passes the Government of India Act of 1935. This Act provides base for the establishment of an All India Federation based on the union of the British Indian Provinces and Princely States. Lady Modi informs Jaya about the Imperial summons she has got to take part in a masked ball, to impress the Viceroy.

In 1936, the King Emperor is dead, and the dashing Prince of Wales becomes the new King of England. After a pretty long time the Emperor gives up his throne for the determined relations with Mrs Simpson, who
has two previous husbands. Through radio he states: “I cannot carry the heavy burden of state without the help and support of the woman I love” (R 408). In the same year Elections are called in the British India to ascertain the conflicting claims of the National Congress and the Muslim League.

By 1937, the Viceroy issues strongly worded advice to all the Indian Rulers to join the Federation or they would have to face serious consequences. He sends personal emissaries to push the rulers to a decision. Major Osborne states Jaya that the Viceroy has exhausted every avenue urging to save them from dying in the past and now he has forced by giving an ultimatum. “Either half the rulers join the Federation by September 1939 or royal India loses the chance of sharing in the governing of India” (R 411-412).

The Indian rulers scared of losing their power and throne think it necessary to impress a nationalist. So, in 1938 Jaya invites Arun Roy at Sirpur to witness the achieved progress and address the masses. At Lady Reading Park he delivers speech on the reformation of the British India, slavery system and democracy. He inspires people to grasp their chance to share in the government and demand election. He says, “True justice lies in the claims of the majority....Demand elections in every Indian kingdom. Let history say it was the subjects, not the kings, of royal India who freed every Indian from the shackles of slavery” (R 418).
During September 1939, the war breaks out between the Great Britain and Germany which has suspended the preparation of Federation for the indefinite time.

In 1940, Hitler overruns France which results a massive evacuation and the situation becomes perilous. Witnessing the situation, the whole subcontinent rises to aid the Empire irrespective of resistance to Indian Self-government. The German’s attack on England moves the entire nation so much that the Nizam of Hyderabad donates an entire squadron of fighters to Britain.

At the same time at Lahore Fort Jinnah announces a separate country for the Muslims where Nehru announces that India would become a Republic. Throughout the sub-continent, the war for supremacy is going on. The Indian National Congress launches Civil Disobedience Movement with a demand of full ruling powers along with threat to halt half a million wartime serving Indian soldiers. To fulfil their demands the Great Britain sends a wartime cabinet member Sir Stafford Cripps to offer Indians a chance to frame their own constitution but the Viceroy responds to this movement by jailing prominent nationalist leaders which heighten the Anti-British sentiments.

Japan attacks the Pearl Harbour of America and both the countries enter the war. With the development of war Japanese aeroplanes start bombing Indian parts of Chittagong and Calcutta in an attempt to gain
Burma. In order to assist Britain’s Allied Empire American troops arrive in the Eastern India and use the network of airstrips of Sirpur. The food conditions also become more and more serious creating a famine like situation.

The failure of Cripps Mission in April 1942 makes it clear that Britain is unwilling to offer an honorable settlement. So, the National Congress launches the Quit India Movement, urging all Indians to cease cooperation with the British. In this struggle, the common people demonstrate an unparalleled heroism and militancy. The velocity of events in the British India can be estimated through a terse letter from Mrs Roy. She writes:

*Calcutta has become a madhouse. Young men queue in front of British recruiting offices while starving peasants flood into the city. The Viceroy has given orders for the machine-gunning of students from the air in Bihar and Bengal to stop the Quit India movement.* (R 430)

The Japanese army continues its invasion and reaches up to two hundred miles far from Sirpur borders. On getting news Maharajah Arjun leaves the palace along with Sirpur lancers to defend his Kingdom. Within two weeks his movements become unable to be tracked through the heavy jungle. Jaya prohibits her lancers to join Arjun’s suicidal journey into
battle and Sir Akbar observes this war as an unmitigated disaster for India. He observes bitterly:

Between two and three million people dead of starvation. Self-government postponed indefinitely, making Hindu-Muslim hatreds more savage than they have ever been. And now ninety thousand Indian troops have been taken prisoner on this front, hukam. They are being forced to work like animals to build rail links through Burma so Emperor Hirohito can occupy India and we can exchange our slavery to the British for slavery to the Japanese. (R 435)

After a month’s struggle Arjun along with his lancers reaches Sirpur but the king has been suffering from bad malaria and a leg injury. By the time he recovers, the war in Europe has ended but the King Hirohito has not yet surrendered. The whole world is waiting for his surrender. Suddenly the radio broadcast comes that the American atom bomb has destroyed two Japanese cities, the devastation is so fierce that it has melted miles around sucking houses and human lives.

In 1945, the British Empire indulges in the process of transferring the power of government to Indians but feels regretted due to legal arguments. Five hundred independent kingdoms and the major nationalist parties are struggling among themselves to acquire powers. The British parliament proposes an interim government in which the two parties; the
National Congress and the Muslim league would rotate power but the National Congress refuses to share equal power with the Muslim league. The tragedy lies as Jinnah remains intransigent in his demands for Pakistan, while Nehru mentions that only the National Congress would speak for India. Observing this Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India comments: “The more I see of these Indian politicians, the more I despair of India” (R 438). Pondering upon the fate of subcontinent, Sir Akbar, the prime minister of Sirpur expresses his great despair in following words:

When I came to Sirpur as a young man, the world was simple. All of us, Hindus and Muslims, nationalists and rulers, wanted the same thing—to live with dignity, free of Britain’s interference. But I am too old to understand this new India or the greed of leaders snarling over the corpse of a nation that has not yet been born. (R 440)

The communal madness of Hindu-Muslim antagonism overshadows the entire country. In 1946, the Muslim demonstrators are at their peak and carrying huge rallies demanding a separate nation for them. Intellectuals, nationalists and every common people are worriedly discussing the future of great nation who has fought for half a century together to create this present. Their voices are discussing:

When Jinnah was President of the Indian National Congress, he was the first architect of Hindu-Muslim unity.
Twice Muslim fanatics tried to assassinate him for his religious tolerance. That he, of all men, should be prepared to tear this great civilization in half for religion!

Mrs Naidu says, Jinnah is like a fallen Lucifer—and young Nehru is dangerously extreme in his judgements. (R 443)

During this miserable period, a bloodthirsty mob snatches lives of Sirpur’s Maharajah and the Prime Minister. Jaya too becomes a victim of these communal riots and loses her son Arjun by the hands of ill-fated destiny.

In the year 1947, the nation earned hard freedom and tragic partition. Here, Gita Mehta has made a sincere attempt in re-writing the partition riots that took place after Independence. She has highlighted the role of Kingdoms during the communal chaos. “The kingdoms of royal India offered a haven from the communal killings that were ravaging the new nations carved out of British India” (R 449).

She has also presented a picturesque description of migrating people and their condition. Millions of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikhs flee with their children and the few possession into the strange countries because of the fear of being homeless, slaughtering of persons, rape, pillage and burning. All these activities become ordinary occurrences of day today life. At stations, crowded compartments of Refugee trains have been butchered completely in the name of God. According to Mehta at that time no army
was there for assistance but the officials of India and Pakistan were fighting over possessions of weapons:

What army, Bai- Sa? There is only a Boundary Force now. The Navy, The Army, The Air Force have all been carved up. Their officers are sitting in Delhi haggling like housewives over how many guns, ships, aircrafts and tanks belong to Pakistan and how many to India. \((R 449)\)

To avoid Civil War the British Empire asks all the rulers to put their signatures on Instrument of Accession and merge with India. In between Sir Conrad Confield, the head of British Political officers comes forward in support of India and Indian Rulers. He along with a few officers burns the secret files about the weaknesses and vices of the Indian rulers, which the Viceroy, Mountbatten is going to handover to Nehru.

To stop the carnage, Gandhi undertakes a fast unto death. By the end of January 1948, Gandhi is assassinated by a Hindu fanatic on his way to a prayer meeting. His last words were, “Ram. Ram. Ram” \((R 451)\). The entire country is shocked to face such a great loss. Jaya compares Gandhi’s last uttering with the mantra of Sati Mata both of which impart the same meaning: “The name of God is Truth” \((R 451)\).

Two years of Independence have been passed but India is not yet a developed and structured nation but a nation-in-the-making. The authorities of new born India are framing the ideology and culture of
democracy. Democracy is designed with the objective of unifying the Indian people taking account of caste religious, ethnic and linguistic differences. In this new emerging world, Jaya too emerges with full enthusiasm after being guided by her teachers Raj Guru and Major Vir Singh. They tell her, “Your dharma is protection, Bai-Sa. You cannot escape your destiny” (R 454).

Jinnah dies of cancer weighing only seventy pounds. Gita Mehta presents this incidence as India’s bad luck. Through Jaya she has expressed her grief on partition, “What a pity Mountbatten’s transfer of power did not run a year late, Major Osborne. If Jinnah was dying, perhaps Pakistan need never have happened. In an ancient land like India, would a year or two mattered so much?” (R 456)

Jaya signs the Instrument of Accession prepared by Sardar Patel and hands over the papers of three thousand years old kingdom for merging into the United India:

The negotiations for transfer of power that ensued after the end of the War brought the problem of the states to the centre of the stage. It was indeed, to the credit the national leadership, especially Sardar Patel, that the extremely complex situation created by the lapse of British paramountcy—which rendered the States legally independent—was handled in a manner that defused the situation to a great degree. (Chandra 360)
Stepping ahead in the path of democracy she holds Durbar weeks after week explaining it to the citizens. The palaces are transformed into different units. City Palace is converted into a library, the smaller palaces have turned into educational institutions; Purdah palace remains a hospice for harem and refugee ladies and even the Maharani Jaya shifts to the British Residency on the prominence of the hill that overlooks the river.

For the upcoming elections, Jaya signs her election petitions at Sirpur Law Courts as an independent candidate against Arun Roy who is wishing to rule over Sirpur. James Osborne wishes her good luck stating: “Congratulations, Bai–Sa. It was the dream of British Empire to teach the princes of India about democracy” (R 461).

On January 26, 1950 the Constitution of India comes into force. Sardar Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister of India reaffirms the agreements between individual Indian Kingdoms and the Indian Union by the privy-purse settlements and declares at Indian Parliament:

*The privy-purse settlements are in the nature of considerations for the surrender by the rulers of all their ruling powers and also for the dissolution of the States....*

*...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.* (R 462)
Mrs Indira Gandhi the Prime Minister of India introduces a bill in the Parliament to discontinue the *privy-purses* and abolish the concept of rulership which is passed in 1970-71, stating “The intention of Government is to discontinue the privy purses and abolish the concept of rulership” (*R* 463).

Thus, *Raj* can be assessed as a chronicle of period from 1897 to 1950 recording India’s freedom struggle. It can also be read as a saga of dutiful and devoted Princess Jaya Devi who struggles amidst the transforming socio-political changes. Beverly Schneller in his article “Visible and Visitable” writes, “Mehta has, in fact, created a character which is consistent throughout the novel. Jaya has always been in the service of India; the larger historical events simply require the shift of her methods but not her focus.”

Jaya Devi the protagonist of *Raj* has been presented as the Princess of Balmer, a twelve hundred years old Rajputana dynasty. Her mother the Maharani of Balmer and her father Maharajah Jai Singh both possess the qualities of ideal rulers. Jaya despite being born as an inevitable part of patriarchal society is not strictly raised in purdah system. Jaya’s education, which is traditional as well as modern, provides us with scope to understand the time of Indian renaissance.

Jaya’s traditional education starts very much according to the Royal customs and rituals. Her training starts with waking up before dawn to
awaken Gods, to watch the rising sun and to accompany Maharani in reciting the ancestral litany of Balmer. She is given lessons on music, rangoli, store keeping, palace servants’ management and the Royal customs’ practices. At an early age she has been taught to fast for two days in every seven days and “… no fish to be eaten by the women of the royal house until desert lands had an abundance of water; no meat to be eaten during the breeding season of animals; no songbirds to be kept in cages until the foreign usurper had left India” (R 43).

The Maharani has insisted to raise Jaya in traditional manner, but Maharajah Jai Singh decrees that his daughter is not going to be raised in purdah. After morning vows Jaya joins her father for daily excursions outside the walls of the Fort. At the age of five she dares to see a large black panther with dripping blood. Princess has been extremely frightened on which Maharajah teaches her the very first lesson on traditions of courage by saying, “Rulers are men and men are always frightened. A man cannot govern unless he confronts his own fear” (R 5).

On their jungle visit she is given lessons on medicinal qualities of herbs to safeguard against snakebite and other things by Major Vir Singh. Along with the riding lessons he also teaches her shooting and polo playing. He has always been very strict to her and never takes under consideration of age, sex or injuries but always encourages stating, “… a Rajput princess had to learn endurance” (R 47).
For her English lessons, Maharajah Jai Singh appoints Mrs Roy, an austere Indian lady draped in home spun sari. She carves in her a great patriotic fervor and also gives training to combat with the changing era. Throughout the novel she encompasses Jaya about the world happenings and the growth of democracy.

Her father perhaps has a premonition of future changes puts her under the strict discipline of Raj guru. He teaches her Chanakya’s *Arthasastra* and all about the four arms of Kingship: *Saam, Daam, Dand* and *Bhed*. Jaya being a fastidious scholar studies the tenets on civil jurisprudence, criminal jurisprudence and its revenue system. Along with it she acquires the basic knowledge of other subjects like mathematics, grammar, philosophy, science and commerce. She also studies great personalities of these streams to probe deeper into giant atlas of human thought and learns to save Throne of the state in welfare of the kingdom’s citizens.

Her mother, Maharani of Balmer, seems to fear that Maharajah Jai Singh is bringing up the princess like a son and being alarmed she announces her decision to undertake Jaya’s training by herself. At the age of twelve Jaya has been taught the traditional art of personal decoration to get a comfortable ambience with her in-laws. The purdah ladies teach her about gemstones, clothing, jewellery, occasions, walking-style etc. They also teach her the *sola-shringar*, the sixteen art of being a woman in order
to please husband and give tips to maintain an aesthetic attraction between the couple.

Besides education the other factors which shape Jaya’s destiny and provide her with great strength for tolerance and guidance come out to be the influence of some personalities from her life like Maharajah Jai Singh, Major Vir Singh, Rajguru, Tikka, James Osborne and a few female characters.

Maharajah Jai Singh of Balmer has been portrayed as an ideal Hindu Rajputana Ruler having compassion for the country-men. Being a rationalist, he modifies his people and dynasty with a perpetuating grace. At the time of famine he makes his wife to break purdah for the sake of serving people, while in the contemporary society breaking purdah is treated like denuding oneself. Maharani expresses; “He wants me to break purdah. If I obey, I will become like the zenana eunuchs—neither a woman within the protection of women, nor a man in the world of men” (R 33).

He always gives his Maharani equal rights on socio-political matters and rejects thoughts of narrowness and untouchability. Electrification, illumination, telephone, movies, a new science college, expansion of University, new irrigation system, shares and many more progressive works can be witnessed during his reign. According to the need of hour he also imitates democracy by explaining it to the villagers, “I speak of a new language of power. Each village must choose someone to represent its
interests who can attend the Secretariat and learn this new method of government” (R 148).

Towards the end of novel Jaya can be seen imitating her father’s way of action by being a dutiful Regent Maharani. Her teachers Rajguru and Major Vir Singh provide her with discipline and austerity to withstand during the political and psychological difficulties. Throughout the novel their lessons provide her with concrete base to build a brighter future, like the initiation of democracy. Her participation in democracy is also guided by them: “Your dharma is protection, Bai-sa. You cannot escape your destiny” (R 454).

Tikka, the Prince of Balmer has been centered to focus on the strategic thoughts and policies of the English Empire. He is hailed as a victim of westernization but the trait which remains inspiring in Jaya’s life is the zeal to fulfil his dharma and for this he sacrifices his life too.

James Osborne, son of Captain Osborne and Tikka’s childhood friend is one of the major characters who has supported on every path of the protagonist’s journey. James Osborne an English boy born in India possesses gentleness, compassion and respect for every culture. He proves to be a true friend and accompanies Jaya from the first success to the last. At the age of ten Jaya shoots her first tiger and at this time James is sharing the same howdah. On their jungle expedition he supports Jaya to hunt and overcome her shivering fear. The incidence has created an eternal
bonding of loyal friendship between them and she feels: “… so untouched by the rigid traditions which tainted the faces of men” (R 103).

At the end of novel Jaya is accounted signing the petition at Sirpur Law Courts as an independent candidate against Arun Roy with the help of Major James Osborne.

Raj; being one of the best historical novels also provides us with a potential forum for discussion of prevalent cultural values. This can be estimated by peeping into the lives of the major female characters. The societal setting depicted in the novel is decadent and obnoxious. The women are more dependent on men and have to obey without any resistance. Even the most important decision of one’s marriage is less a matter of personal choice but more an arrangement. On attaining widowhood women have been forced to endure ritually cursed humiliating practice. The novel gives readers the first-hand knowledge of the rigid social norms to redefine and rediscover tradition. Centuries old Hindu orthodox custom “Sati Pratha” is explained with the thought of endurance rather than escapism. The ascetic Sati-Mata, who has prophecies and supernatural powers, defines it as follows:

The title sati should not be given to a woman who burns herself, but to a woman of virtue. And the greatest virtue of endurance. I am called the Sati Mata because my gurus are the Five Satis, those five virtuous women who refused to burn
themselves on their husbands’ pyres. The true sati has the will to continue when the familiar world fragments around her. *(R 127)*

Along with Sati-Mata the ancestral litany of the Balmer Maharani also expresses true meaning of Sati. Through the recital of tale, Queen Pushpavati has been described as the greatest queen of Rajputana history who refused to mount the funeral pyre after the death of her father, brother and husband to deliver the child she was carrying. She endured the taint of widowhood, delivered the child and finally ascended the pyre, “And thus did our Empire come to be known as Rajputana, the Empire of the Sons of the King” *(R 13)*.

In the same way the Maharani of Balmer too behaves like sati and is also known as “Sati Mata” among people. Towards the conclusion of *Raj* and emergence of democracy Jaya too has to perform like sati, by enduring the loss of her father, brother, husband and son and continue her services.

Structurally, the novel is divided into four books, Balmer, Sirpur, Maharani and Regent. Book one starts with the description of famine in the desert kingdom of Rajasthan, Balmer. During this period, Balmer is blessed with its heir, Prince Tikka and five years later Jaya is born.

In the first book; Balmer, the novelist has dealt with Jaya’s education and influences which later provide support to resist her hardships. Towards the end of this book she loses her brother and then her
father. Tikka embraces death during the war while Maharajah Jai Singh becomes a victim of the conspiracy and dies of influenza. The Maharani attains widowhood and is forced to leave Balmer. At this time the Maharajah of Dungra invites her and opens his house as a brother. Amidst these turbulences Jaya gets married with the proxy of Prince Pratap; Prince of Sirpur. Her marriage can be estimated as the initiation of virtual relations in her life. All wedding rituals are performed by Rani and Raja Man Singh as a proxy of her mother and father, the role of brother is performed by John, her cousin and even her Bridegroom has been symbolized in the great ancient sword of Sirpur.

The second book is Sirpur, named on the small ancient kingdom of twelve hundred years old glorious history sprawled across the delta of Brahmaputra River. Sirpur, one of the richest kingdoms, has its own Law Courts, University, Tea-gardens, Emerald mines and a two thousand year old Kamini Temple. The palace has many inside palaces, spread in three square miles compound. Jaya’s new palace, the Wales Palace, has been built in Indo-Saracen style a blend of Victorian architecture and Indian grandeur. The marriage symbolizes her transplantation into fertile Brahmaputra land.

At Sirpur, the Dowager Maharani, grandmother of Prince Pratap always behaves motherly to Jaya. She passes two years with her and learns the habits and shocking truths about her husband. She tells Jaya “… she
had sent girl after smooth-limbed girl from the harem to seduce the awkward schoolboys during their holidays" (R 180).

Only after a year the Dowager Maharani takes Jaya to Kamini Temple and blesses chanting: “May your homage to the Goddess bring fruit to your womb and may you enrich our house with sons” (R 185). The blessing makes Jaya distraught with her strange expectation as she has not yet seen her husband and it takes almost two years to happen. On the arrival of Prince Pratap Jaya is eager to meet but he postpones the meeting for the next day lunch.

On their first meeting Prince Pratap ruthlessly comments on her traditional bridal costume stating “Wash all that nonsense off your hands and feet. And change out of these Christmas decorations” (R 189) and also delivers his intentions in straightforward words, “Ours is strictly a marriage of convenience, Jaya Devi. Should the necessity for children ever arise, I am sure we can both rise to our duty, but until then...” (R 190). Gaijan is correct in his assessment: “In Hindu society, to honour women becomes the subsidiary or untouchable ideology since the centuries. The duties imposed on women are more demanded. Their rights are not given to them” (260).

Later on, Jaya reveals that Pratap married her because the British had wished him to do so. In order to please them he asks Jaya to learn English mannerism as well as French, Italian and Spanish languages.
Being an obedient, dutiful Indian wife she learns everything taught by her teacher lady Modi, French transformed Indian lady from Bombay. She grooms Jaya and becomes her guardian and guide till the end. She makes Jaya realize her immense beauty and need not require leaving Indianness. During Prince of Wales’ visit to Sirpur, Jaya presents herself with temerity and also plays polo. Her playing impresses him and compells to praise her: “Congratulations, Princess. Your goal was without question the best goal in the game” (R 225). While leaving he invites both of them to visit England.

In this part, Jaya again comes in contact with Mrs Roy and Arun Roy. Mrs Roy arranges her meeting with the major nationalist leaders and also guides her to select the right path of action through an inspiring article from the Bombay Chronicle newspaper entitled, “The Status of Indian Women: A tale of Woe. By one of them” (R 237).

While Arun Roy, a nationalist lawyer comes to Jaya smelling her loneliness, he shows great concern and briefly kisses her which makes Jaya feel guilty as an adulteress in a marriage that has not yet been consummated. He questions, “A married woman, and yet you shy away like a girl, Bai-Sa….Is all well with you, Bai-Sa? Is your husband kind?” (R 242) Arun Roy comments this by keeping in view of the affair between Esme Moore and Prince Pratap.
Lady Modi tells Jaya about the affair between her husband and a sizzling Anglo-Indian, Flamenco dancer Esme Moore. She says, “… Prince Pratap had been to the Globe Theatre to see the dancer Esme Moore at least a dozen times. I believe Pratap and Hari Singh of Kashmir are having quite a battle for her favours” (R 234). On realizing this bitter fact Jaya becomes enraged but never allows her expressions to reflect on the face. At this crucial moment the Prime Minister of Sirpur, Sir Akbar reminds Jaya of her power she possesses. He helps her by revealing that their traditional marriage is an alliance of power, so she must use it.

At the end of the second book Pratap is declared the King of Sirpur and Jaya becomes the Maharani. During their visit to England, Maharajah Victor, the elder brother of Pratap commits suicide because of his love relationship with Cora Hart. Cora Hart has always desired to become Maharani of Sirpur but realizing the fact that she would never be accepted by King George and Queen Mary, announces her marriage with Texan, which concludes with Maharajah Victor’s suicide.

The third book titles “Maharani” on Jaya; as she becomes the Maharani of state in this section. After being Maharani she becomes the wife of King of Sirpur but lacks affection, tenderness, dignity and satisfaction. The laboured urgency of Pratap drags Jaya into the world of dreadful remoteness and thinks of a captor’s assault. She realizes that he only touches her in the drunken state, “… Maharajah Pratap appeared in his wife’s bedroom and drunkenly plunged himself into her body as if she
were a concubine brought to him for the night” (R 287). During these treacherous moments her mind often slips into the shadows of James Osborne and Arun Roy with whom she has soft corner. She can feel James Osborne’s arm around her shoulders and Arun Roy’s lips against her skin. The relationship between Jaya and Pratap continues to accomplish necessity of the heir as per the British verdict. As soon as the palace doctors confirm Jaya is with child Maharajah Pratap decides to leave for Europe along with Esme Moore.

Sirpur is blessed with an heir. Jaya becomes mother but her misery seems never ending. She is deprived of her maternal rights and is not allowed to breast feed her son: “The Maharanis of Sirpur employ wet nurses. I will not have my wife feeding a baby like a peasant woman” (R 298).

The heir of Sirpur is named “Arjun” after the name of great king whose chariot had been driven by God Krishna. In a ceremony Rajguru announces Arjun as a new Prince of Sirpur. This fills Jaya with feelings of unfamiliar security and proud for keeping Sirpur line intact.

This section of Raj also throws light on the decadent and extravagant society of the Royal India. The Sirpur state gets an invitation from the Nawab of Junagarh on the marriage of his favourite bitch “Roshanara” with a dog “Bobby”. All powerful Kingdoms along with Viceroy have been invited for the grand marriage ceremony. The Nawab is so fond of
dogs that he has built three fully-equipped dog hospitals, fans to keep cool in summer and fire places to keep warm in winter. The kingdom has nearly eight hundred animals. Rulers from all over India are found enjoying the function while the whole country is busy planning the protest against Simon Commission.

Pratap’s relationship with Esme Moore also sets an example for the readers to understand the contemporary society. Esme Moore is reared up in a whore house run by Madame Enid in Calcutta. Madame Enid provides shelter to all the ill-fated babies who on attaining maturity are being treated like princesses by the rulers. Being ambitious Esme Moore wishes to become an actress but Pratap persuades her to become his mistress with the promise of marriage. Their relationship becomes an open scandal and Esme Moore starts blackmailing Pratap. P. Aruna Devi comments, “Pratap represents many Indian rulers who try to satisfy the Angrez, bringing disgrace to the dignity of royal blood” (348).

As the situation goes beyond his control he confesses in front of Jaya stating: “Breach of promise, my dear, photographs, letters proving she broke her engagement to a wealthy Iraqi Jew because I promised marriage” (R 332). Feelings of disgust and fear of future threatening to the kingdom, forces Jaya to settle the matter and to bargain for the power. She says, “I wish to be named Regent Maharani of Sirpur, in the event of anything happening to you, until Arjun is of an age to take the throne (R 333). Jaya handles Esme Moore by providing role in a
Hollywood movie through her father’s earlier investment in Hollywood shares.

Major James Osborne is appointed the Resident British Citizen at Sirpur and gradually becomes an essential part of the kingdom. During this period the freedom movement is going on in full swing. Bhagat Singh explodes bomb on publication of Simon Commission’s report and the anti-British sentiments are flourishing very fast. The situation becomes critical when the demonstrators start shouting slogans against the Kingdoms who support the British Empire. Amidst this Maharajah Pratap goes to the flying club to relax himself but unfortunately his plane crashes and he meets an untimely tragic death. The fate forces Jaya to accept the taint of widowhood. She becomes the Regent Maharani of Sirpur and also the guardian of four years old Arjun; the Maharajah of Sirpur.

Book four “Regent”, the last section of Raj, deals with the tragic turbulences in Jaya’s life and her emergence as a desperate dedicated democratic soul. When Jaya goes back to Sirpur, for the first time she witnesses people’s rage and strength against the British. After the death of Pratap she is declared unclean for attaining widowhood and has been confined only to the Pooja room for thirteen days. After mourning when she returns to her apartment she seems too fragile to support the drawn face. She has no glass bangles to wear, no long hair to be combed and no jewellery to be worn around the neck. Watching her like this James asks in astonishment: “What have they done to you, Bai–Sa?” (R 355)
Small Arjun has been declared the Maharajah of Sirpur. During his coronation ceremony the Dowager Maharani and Jaya watch it from the balcony of purdah palace as widows’ presence is considered unlucky. After the ceremony the Dowager Maharani declares the authority of the state for the whole year of mourning. She announces, “... until Maharani Jaya Devi’s period of mourning is ended, the Seals of State and the keys to the Treasury remain in the hands of the British Resident” (R 357). To safeguard the newly crowned king from the bad omen of storm Raj guru orders, “… the priests must take custody of the child until the year of mourning is over” (R 357).

During the first six months of mourning the priests in the Regency have speeded up the ill feelings. So, the Prime Minister of Sirpur, Sir Akbar suggests Jaya to visit her mother’s place and in their absence Major James Osborne and Sir Akbar would be authorized to govern Sirpur.

Jaya meets her mother, the widow Maharani of Balmer after a long span of ten years. Being overwhelmed with emotions she says, “I knew I would hold my daughter before I died ... but I thought I would hold a bride, not a widow” (R 363).

Jaya’s eyes are filled with tears and the Maharani reminds her that Rajput girls are never allowed to display their grief and also encourages her stating: “Remember the Sati Mata’s words, Bai–Sa. The true sati continues to live when her world has shattered around her” (R 363).
The widow Maharani of Balmer is popularly known as “Sati-Mata” as she has devoted herself to the welfare of people. She has established a dispensary, a nursing home, a free kitchen and a school at Dungra. She tells Jaya that Tiny Dungra manages the funds to run all these charitable institutions and has great respect for him. She applauds saying “Tiny manages our funds. The boy is a genius—no matter how much we spend, the money never diminishes” (R 364). She calls herself a satyagrahi “a seeker of truth” as she has been following the principle given by Sati Mata “Ram Nam Sat Hai. Name of God is Truth” (R 128) which is also same as Gandhi’s mantra. Following this she exchanges her traditional veil for the hand spun cloth “… the livery of India’s freedom” (R 364) and also joins Gandhi’s historical “Dandi Salt March”.

Jaya’s visit to Dungra becomes very fruitful as she learns administrative skills, governance and foreign affairs under Tiny’s guidance. She studies various books and gazettes “Famine Control 1897-1903, Treaty Negotiations. Viceregal Visits. Irrigation Projects 1900–1928” (R 365) and also spends time with Dungra engineers and administrators to polish her skills.

It is the period of political unrest and transmutation. The whole nation, rocked by the Civil Disobedience Movement, is demanding total self-governance. Sirpur too is caught in the grip of anarchy. To avoid fragmentation of the state Jaya successfully visits tribal areas with Major James Osborne.
Tiny Dungra and Major Osborne suggest Maharani to send Prince Arjun to England for his studies. Before Arjun’s departure his grandmother Maharani of Balmer dies and Jaya coincides this with the end of Royal India. Subsequently earthquake shakes Sirpur and devastates the eastern regions of the state including famous tea gardens, the foothills, green rice fields and a landscape of ripped jungle.

Jaya handles the situation skillfully and also disseminates courage among the residents. Rescue operations are organised through the air until the roads and temporary bridges are restored. Bags of grains, vegetables and other essentials are dropped by the plane.

Jaya is busy managing the tasks of government with utmost dedication. Arjun is in England and would not be returning for another year. The Dowager Maharani becomes crippled off arthritis and leaves Jaya all alone in one monsoon night. Sirpur is in the grip of emotional and political crises. To come out of this she asks Arun Roy to provide legal assistance.

During his weeklong tour Arun Roy inspects various development projects going on in the Kingdom. He visits Maharajah Pratap Dam, Network of schools and dispensaries, various irrigation projects and the proud project of air strips which connects the farthest part of the kingdom. During their jungle visit both of them wait on a high platform to keep vigil for tiger but with the increasing darkness of night Arun Roy’s desire
deepens to explore her. He strokes her hair and brushes his lips on her neck. In his tenderness Jaya allows herself to relax and wipe out the previous violent humiliation on the grass enveloped machan.

Hindu-Muslim gentry are prevalent in Sirpur. On this Sir Akbar comments:

Is it our fault that Jinnah is being hailed as the saviour of India’s Muslims?

The fight between the Muslim League and the National Congress is a fight to govern British India. We live in Sirpur. What we have to do with it? (R 420)

The situations become worse and go beyond the control of Maharani. The Kingdom is seeking support from the nationalists to fulfil its aspirations. The British Resident reports all these activities in his secret report to the Empire stating:

The Regent Maharani seems to be very close to the National Congress leader, Arun Roy, at a time when it is hazardous to the Empire’s interests. Ignoring convention, the Regent Maharani invited the nationalist leader to spend three days with her away from the court. Risking public scandal, she also accompanied him alone at night into the jungle. Her intimate association with a man like Arun Roy imperils Britain’s interests in Sirpur. (R 421)
The Great War is declared. Arjun is much interested in battle especially air battles. By eighteen he leaves the palace to defend his kingdom. During the war he is injured and returns with broken leg and malaria. It is the time when the National Congress of India has launched the “Quit India Movement.” In 1946, Jaya loses her son Arjun and Sir Akbar, the Prime Minister of Sirpur in communal riots. She is completely shattered and lost. In 1947, India gets Independence with the formation of a new country Pakistan.

The British ask the rulers to sign an Instrument of Accession and merge with United India. At this critical juncture, Jaya goes to Balmer to seek advice from Raj Guru and Major Vir Singh. Raj Guru reminds her the first lesson of Rajniti i.e. Praja, the people. Keeping in view of his advice she accepts the leadership of Sirpur and makes up her mind to file the nomination for the upcoming elections against Arun Roy. She feels, “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?” (R 460) With the help of Major James Osborne she signs her nomination as an independent candidate.

Afterwards the novel tells us about the complete extinction of Royal India. At the time of formation of United India, Privy Purses decided are stopped by passing a bill in 1970-71 by Mrs Indira Gandhi; the Prime Minister of India.
Thus, the novel can be assessed as a rewriting of history along with the realistic depiction of society in pre-independence and post-independence era. Through the protagonist Jaya the evils of the existing social norms are presented with modifications and are silently rebelled under different situations. She is shown participating in the state administration and working reformation. Readers are shown that the highly cultured Royal Society is also affected by the struggle for independence and Jaya being a member of such society suffers like any other common individual. Throughout the novel she is found oscillating between tradition and modernity but finally selects a mid-way path simply by her high moral values and complete surrender to *dharma*. This leads her to participate in the evolution of the most popular fledgling democracy in the world.