

Gita Mehta's Raj: a Study of Indian Women in Their Conservative Backdrop

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Abstract

Gita Mehta is an accomplished Indian author. In her works, she has captured the Indian soul. When closely examined, her narratives reveal the peculiarities of India's ever-present customary culture. Raj is about the evolution of India's autonomy and Kshatriya dharma. The Indian climate has been imaginatively and naturally blended with conservative examples and contemporary innovations. Religion, otherworldliness, legislative issues, and orientation issues are all made sense of and rekindle one's interest in this country and life in general. Raj is a true story about Indian legislative concerns, autonomous development, heated arguments, and the fight against British authority in India. From 1897 to 1970, the clever spans the transition from British royal power to the rise of opportunity, and finally to a popularity-based republic. In this paper's conservative social structure, Jaya is the underdog, and her significant other, the patriarch, is in the middle; but, in the postcolonial text's opposing rationale, Jaya has true power, and she is the victim.

Keywords: Patriarchy, conservational, historic, slavery, and freedom.

Introduction

In India, women are frequently depicted as silent victims. They are portrayed as defenders of conservative Indian culture. In India, they will be cast in a variety of characters such as mother, wife, daughter, sister, lady love, prostitute, and so on. This way of living is mostly attributable to the patriarchal society that now exists. In Indian civilization, women took pride in service and self-sacrifice. They were inspired by the real-life images of Sita, Anasuya, Kantari, and others. The liberation of Indian women from the shackles of illiteracy, servitude, and ignorance, on the other hand, signaled the beginning of their independence. When Indian women had to choose between tradition and modernity, western education provided a bridge between the two. A woman is never considered an autonomous creature in a patriarchal society.

The emergence of radical women writers on the Indian literary landscape is a recent phenomenon. In her work, they depict the idealized Indian setting of a

woman's appearance. They must write from the perspective of women. They convey the emotion and experience of a woman in the form of a wise mother, for example, quite well [1]. Because they write about women's oppression and emancipation, the emergence of female writers in Indian English fiction is significant. As women are torn between desire and subordination to the patriarchal system, the battle between passion and reason grows more complicated.

Women's writers have investigated the socio-cultural forms and ideals that have shaped women's image and function in society. Gita Mehta has researched the emotional and moral issues of the woman character to create interpersonal harmony. Gita Mehta's *Raj* is a richly detailed and vivid historical account of a young woman born into Indian nobility under the British Raj. Mehta's readers are shown a fraction of British India's early struggle for independence as it has touched a small sector of high culture in Indian society through Young Jaya Singh's story. Mehta not only uses fine language and vibrant images of Indian culture to tell her story, but she also provides a picture of Indian colonial life from an Indian perspective. She uses gentle persuasion to put historical facts in a magnificent oven tapestry based on the strength of character of her female protagonist.

"The trouble with Raj was that I was being bent all the time to a kind of imaginary American shop girl reader," Wallia Mehta explains in an interview with C.J.S. I

believe Simon and Schuster's plan was for me to create these blockbusters, which I am incapable of achieving — I am not talented enough" (Raj, 3).

Jaya Singh, the Maharajah's only daughter and Maharani of Balmer, is at the center of this epic story. Her mother raised her in the thousand-year-old purdah custom, and she was educated like her royal brother Tikka, as per her father's wishes. Jaya has her father's dark skin and fair eyes. India's rulers are gearing up for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of Empress Victoria's ascension to the English throne [2]. The Maharaja of Balmer has hosted several European kings and is regarded by the British as one of the most powerful and superior Indian rulers, but his current situation is no better than that of a puppet in their hands.

Despite being a foresighted, caring monarch who is well-liked by his people, he is obliged to engage in covert discussions with the Russian Tsar when his country is facing financial difficulties due to the famine. He travels to England not to do homage to the Victorian empress, but to bargain with diplomats to spare himself and his realm from further embarrassment.

Jai Singh is hesitant to do everything the British ask of him, but as British dominance grows, he is gradually reduced to a complacent king. He does not want his son to receive an education in England that will educate him to despise his homeland. Tikka is persuaded that unless he adopts the Princess of Sirpur's and other

royalty's lifestyles, he would not be able to bring respect to Balmer. Maharaj Jai Singh is dissatisfied with his son's decision to send him to England and to send his men under Tikka's leadership to fight for the Allies in World War I. But he is powerless because he is afraid that his covert conversations with the Russians will be exposed, and he will be punished for his betrayal. Jaya's all-encompassing education in both conventional and cutting-edge. To face her concerns, she learns to ride, hunt, and shoot. Her father instilled in her the monarchical mentality.

"Rulers are men, and men are usually terrified," her father says. Without confronting his fear, a man cannot govern"(Raj, 12).

Major Vir Singh, her field instructor, appears unconcerned about the fact that she is a female. Another teacher is the Raj Guru, who teaches her Rajniti and whom she eventually consults for counsel. Her mother, on the other hand, is concerned that her father is raising her like a son, and has made certain that she is taught the strict, conservative art of personal adornment, music, as well as color, and design aesthetics to please her husband. Miss Roy, who teaches her English literature and also passes on her nationalistic ideals, is another major impact on her. ***"Freedom is my birthright,"*** says Tilak, which has become a personal motto for her. Jaya, as a youngster, talks about the underlying tensions in her father's thinking. ***"Jaya knew her father was not content,"(Raj, 23)*** she says, referring to his silent anger toward the

British, who appear to be the natives' benefactors and well-wishers but are exploiting them. Fearing that he may lose his son in the conflict, he decides to raise his daughter to be a king. When Tikka insists on leading the Balmer forces, he says,

"What dignity is there in empowering those who have made us a subject people, obliged to plead for what is ours?" I'm willing to endure an awful form of blackmail to secure your rightful place as Balmergaddi's heir"(Raj, 48).

His son is sacrificed in the ***"fight of the foreigners"*** by the Rajput honor, which cannot bear the name of cowardice.

"I say to these Angrez officers who earn their living from war, with what right do they label Udaipur a coward?"(Raj, 53)

He argues to his troops before their departure. Before they dare to pronounce the world cowardly to the scion of Chittore and the dynasty of Rana Pratap, let them summon the ghosts of a thousand kings who have fallen in combat; ten thousand queens who have burned themselves for dignity... BalmerLaucers will never be accused of fighting for cash. We are the warrior caste of the Kshatriyas. ***"We are fighting for the Dharma"(Raj, 66).***

The death of his son, however, has devastated this noble Kshatriya. His efforts to keep the English out of his state's affairs fail, and a plot orchestrated by Raja Man Singh, a sycophant of the foreigners, results

in the installation of his son John as Balmer's next monarch. The Maharaja eventually succumbs to the circumstances that have depleted him and die after fighting a losing battle. In the family Jaya marries into, things aren't any better [3]. Maharaja Victor and her husband, Prince Pratap, are eager to satisfy the British with a lower level of respect than Raja Man Singh and others who were willing to grovel in front of the foreign masters.

“Living without pride is not a pleasant business,”(Raj, 71)

Prince Pratap once warned Jaya. This one line encapsulates the situation of the Sirpur Prince, who is said to be a descendant of India's oldest governing family. Jaya and Pratap's marriage is a perfect match between two powerful aristocratic families, as well as a financial agreement that has put the Sirpur House in Balmer's favor. Jaya's dowry both sustains and feeds Prince Pratap's desires. He once requested an early payment of the annual salary made to him by Balmer to attend Emperor George's coronation festivities in London. This is to keep the nice looks of Pratap's complicated connection with the empire. This can be seen in the following lines:

“The more Maharajah Pratap bowed down to the British Empire, the more he despised his wife as a symbol of the empire's influence over his personal life”(Raj, 82).

Jaya kept track of everything that happened in her life in an album. In the presence of the King, she was weighed with Silver. Jaya was irritated by the palace's

voluptuous women's remarks about her undiscovered husband. In her absence, she married Pratap. It takes over two years for him to return from abroad and meet her, and another five years for them to marry. And when she shows up in her conservative bridal gown, he says,

“I'm afraid you won't do princess.” You won't be able to accomplish anything”. Wash all that rubbish off your hands and feet,” he said. Also, get rid of the Christian ornamentation”(Raj, 118).

He explains his motivations during the second encounter. He reminds her that their marriage was a convenience marriage and adds,

“Should the requirement for children ever arise, I am sure we can both rise to our role, but until then..”(Raj, 148).

He is considered an “irresponsible playboy” by the British, who would only be allowed to travel abroad if accompanied by a woman.

“That is why I am looking forward to our marriage.” You can't eat quail or wear a sari at the same time. You are illiterate in all languages. However, I must outmaneuver the empire that pushed me into this marriage through you”(Raj, 176).

He sent a lady to instruct her in the complexities of western life.

“Go towards your fear, child, only then will you find the courage to survive the life that lays before you, exiled from sex... few will realize the terrible cost of your valor, child, the impoverishment of your spirit,”

Sati Mata instructs Jaya. However, you must have the fortitude to live in your nakedness.”(Raj, 188)

The bareness referred to here is emblematic of a woman's unsuccessful attempts to occupy a major role in a world devoid of love. Jaya is bound for fame and status in royal circles [4], but her life is barren because her spouse does not love her. Sati Mata further emphasizes that a true Sati is someone virtuous, not someone who ends her life on her husband's funeral pyre: ***“And the greatest virtue is perseverance.” Because my gurus are the five Satis, those five good women who refused to burn themselves on their husbands' pyres, I am known as the Sati Mata. When the familiar world crumbles around her, the genuine Sati has the desire to persist”(Raj, 198).***

Lady Modi makes an appearance in Jaya's life. Jaya is hairy, she claims, and Pratap doesn't like it. He desires that she be stylish. Like Maharani Cooch Behal, she should wear a sari, hand gloves, and a handbag. She lost her self-consciousness under Lady Modi's supervision. When Pratap saw Jaya with her handbag, high shoes, and unpainted hands, he was overjoyed. He congratulated Lady Modi by kissing her hands, but not Jaya. Jaya believes she can overcome her husband through her perseverance, and she never seeks attention or interferes in his affairs with other women.

“But for many of us, including Tikka, it was the only time in our lives when we

were permitted to be men,” Pratap says during an emotional moment of memory while he is reliving his war experiences to her. “Princess, living without pride is not a pleasurable experience.”“An unwanted wife shares the experience, hukum,” Jaya says quietly (Raj, 201).

This single sentence contains more meaning than any lengthy speech she could have delivered. When Prince Pratap eventually consummates their marriage, it is with an ***“intimacy that polluted her as his remoteness had never done”(Raj, 209).***

The event is portrayed as an unclear recollection, and the irony of her circumstance is that her lengthy yearning for love had now become a forced acceptance of him to provide Sirpur with an heir. She flees to the Purdah Palace as soon as she learns of her pregnancy. When Maharajah Pratap compares her to a peasant woman as she is feeding her child, she becomes furious.

“Maharajah Pratap had already robbed her of the honor of being a wife,”(Raj, 214)

She secretly resents his condemnation of her deed and his recommendation that a wet nurse is employed for her child. He was now grabbing the rights to maternity leave. She lowered her eyes so he wouldn't see the quiet rage rising against the deep respect for a spouse instilled in her by the prayers and rituals that had characterized her entire existence. Despite the hardships she faces, Jaya never gives up; she fights for her rights

and proves to be a tough negotiator [5]. Jay, on the other hand, finds a place for herself within the established tradition and then empowers herself. Jaya is a strong lady who, despite going to great measures to win over her husband, has her thoughts.

For example, she dismisses Lady Modi's recommendation to cut her hair, claiming that long hair is one of the emblems of a married woman. I'm not going to cut it off. For my husband, that would be unlucky. She later refuses to put on a glove and greets the Prince of Wales with her hands folded. Being conservative has a good value in a world where everyone is mindlessly fashionable. She makes a hand bargain with her husband on two occasions, to make the correct impression on his imperial overlords. First, she agrees to play polo with the emperor's visiting prince, putting his arm around her body. Her "goal" was "the best goal in the game," as the Prince of Wales afterward stated. The polo is a significant addition to her strength. She is ashamed of her husband's sexual adventures, notably his emulation of his British masters by wearing the SirpurCrest on his slippers rather than his turban, which one of his concubines returns to Jaya with respect. Because of Jaya's diplomacy and ability to mediate, Pratap agrees to make a deal with her: she will be the Regent of Sirpur until their child is grown, in exchange for her assistance in getting rid of his Anglo-Indian mistress Esme Moore. His relationship with Esme is frowned upon by the British, and it jeopardizes his hopes of assuming the kingdom. Jaya effectively handles the situation and is taken aback by

her husband's assessment of her desire for power:

"Your price would have to be power," he says, and Mehta writes, "After a lifetime as power's victim she aspired to be its executor"(Raj, 222)

Jaya is concerned about her kingdom's destiny.

"How would she keep a kingdom for her son if something happened to her husband when the strongest rulers in India were significant before the power of the British Empire and the ambitious of the Reformists?" (238).

Jaya, like her father, husband, and brother, had to make concessions to the British. After being schooled by an English instructor at Sirpur for a period, her kid is sent to a school in England. To preserve her Sirpur position, she must continue to perform a lot of things against her will. She also needs to rely on James Osborne, whom she has known since childhood, and Sir Akbar, the Prime Minister of Sirpur, to keep her afloat. She does not let anyone get the best of her, unlike her masculine counterparts. Despite the loss of her husband and then her son, she continues to govern her realm with the assistance of James Osborne and the advice of Vir Singh and the Raj Guru of Balmer, recalling the lessons and principles of Rajniti that she was taught as a kid.

She, too, is involved in nationalist intrigue, and Arun Rohrich has been designated a traitor in Osborne's secret

files, but she can easily manipulate the situation if she finds that Roy is also planning to betray her. She immediately switches sides and is redeemed in the eyes of the British, who praise her for maintaining law and order in her kingdom during communal riots before and after the partition. Jaya does not allow James Osborne or Arun Roy, the two men who have symbolized or given her the tender affection that her husband has denied her, to exploit her except for a brief while. Jaya contributes significantly to the improvement of Sirpur's kingdom as a progressive thinker.

As Regent, she is responsible for a variety of public-benefit responsibilities. Arun Roy, on the other hand, makes her a victim. He arrives in her kingdom and tries to drive her people away from her. This is indicative of the reality that politics is dirty, whether it is played by the British, who plunder the colonies while posing as well-wishers, or by nationalists, who pose as supporters of the native Indian rulers while inciting their followers against them [6].

“To take me in your arms, knowing you would use your power to discredit my son's throne and destroy all the work that I have done!”(Raj, 246) Jaya accuses Arun Roy of betraying her trust: ***“To take me in your arms, knowing you would use your power to discredit my son's throne and destroy all the work that I have done!”(Raj, 258)*** Roy is unapologetic in his response: ***“Roy grabbed her hand, and the smile faded from his face. We didn't make a deal, Bai-sa: you came to me of your***

own free will. Did you believe my beauty would keep me from telling the truth to your subjects?”(Raj, 288). As already said, the book portrays Jaya as a true Sati [7]. She does not believe that finding sexual fulfillment in the arms of Arun Roy is incompatible with moral behavior.

If she sleeps with him, she does so in a dignified manner and does not subject herself to abuse. The occurrence is essential because it demonstrates that Jaya is not an ascetic, and it provides her with the long-awaited sexual fulfillment she has been denied, as well as removing the shame she has endured at the hands of her husband. It's also a sign of her growing awareness because she challenges conservative morality and purity ideals. Even though Jaya is reliant on male advice and direction, she has shown a tendency to be able to make her own decisions that are normally correct, and she only follows through with her plans with the agreement of the men she respects.

Her father had been foresighted enough to leave some financial resources in Tiny Dungra's care for her, which Jaya makes use of whenever she feels the need to secure the Sirpur throne for her son by spending money on modernizing the kingdom. After her husband's death, she avoids any conflict with the Sirpur priests by effectively handling all of her tasks. She does not let anyone get the better of her until the very end when she completely disconnects Arun Roy and Osborne by filing election papers to run in the upcoming elections [8]. She finds their

debate about whether the British or the Indians are the ones who started the democratic process in the Indian kingdoms amusing.

She recognizes that they are both capable of deciding the matter because the people will decide the ruler who will represent their interests. When she went to the Rajguru for advice, he asked, "What is the fundamental principle of Rajniti, Baisa?" and she stutteringly replied, "The people." Her mocking laughter also serves as a symbol of her success at the end of the novel. Jaya's trip to Sirpur and its woods with Arun Roy represents her defiance of conservative morals.

And her connection with James Osborne, to whom she has been attracted since she was a child, borders on intimacy that is kept under wraps since he is too conservative and probably too British to have an affair with an Indian princess. Her brief love affair with Arun Roy was described by Naresh K. Jain as an "expansion of her consciousness." According to Mary Eagleton, the expression of sexual desire by women is often stigmatized. Jaya appears to be attempting to dismantle patriarchal power. Her vulnerability to James and Arun Roy's romantic overtures stems from her inhibition and embarrassment.

Her reaction to them is a protest of her husband's dominance over her. She can triumph against other repressive forces in the world because she has surpassed the restrictions of her sex. Jaya is left alone as

Regent, yet she handles herself with dignity and prudence and makes a good impression as a monarch. She is naturally concerned about saving the kingdom for her son as the nationalist movement gains strength in British India [9].

She is caught in a bind and seeks help from her childhood friend James Osborne, who is now a political officer in Sirpur, while also attempting to nurture nationalist leader Arun Roy. Her democratic instincts sound right at the proper time because she is clear-sighted. Mehta can give a comprehensive story without bias or animosity, and, as in her other books, she allows the reader to form their viewpoint from which to understand the history she narrates. Raj is "A historical tale with a wealth of detail, capturing the essence of life during a critical period in India's history," according to Lelia in her review: "Thoroughly loved."

Its major moments are the introduction of women into the plot, with careful consideration paid to the influence on the characters and the emotions elicited by each incident. This novel avoids the frequent pitfall of historical fiction, which is the application of present morality and ethics to history. This story has a genuine ring to it throughout [10]. This book is an excellent introduction to the impact of British rule and independence on Indian life on all levels. It's a book, not a comprehensive historical treatise, but it does a fantastic job of highlighting topics that could be worth further investigation.

Conclusion

As a result, the fact that women were at the center of nationalist speech is a well-known fact that postcolonial studies scholars have viewed as critical to understanding feminism in India. The three strands that run more or less parallel in Raj are native statuary, nationalism, and the women's question in culture and nationalism. Jaya gains a lot of knowledge from her life experiences. The Balmer princess emerges into a liberated, strong, and self-assured woman of free India by the end of the tale.

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