

## *CHAPTER – III*

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### III. I . INTRODUCTION TO GITA MEHTA'S RAJ

'Fearlessness' is the trait of Gita Mehta whose whole family was active in Indian freedom struggle. Her father Biju Patnaik, the ardent freedom fighter became chief minister of Orissa in independent India, her mother supported her father time and again. Mehta's cousin actively participated and later slaughtered in Chittagong Armoury Raid.

She was born on the threshold of Independence. When she was just three years old, she witnessed the countrywide mourning caused because of Gandhiji's death. The tragic event hurt her deeply. Thus, one can say that Gita Mehta is born and brought up while listening to the detailed accounts of the struggle between colonizer and the colonized.

She might need the grand outlet to express all that, which was heaped upon her. That's the reason why she would have chosen the historical novel as a powerful means to express herself. British Libraries are overwhelming with the literature on Indian freedom struggle. Mehta makes maximum use of it, and the outcome of her deep study was the preparation of the background of Raj. Later on, for ten years she took strenuous efforts and in 1989 Raj, her fine historical novel was published and in a short while it enjoyed international fame.

### III. ii . PLOT OF THE NOVEL, RAJ

Raj is the masterpiece which has achieved the coveted success in the contemporary Indian English novels. Personal story of Jaya devi, mingled with the freedom struggle is the essence of Raj. It has divided into four books: Balmer, Sirpur, Maharani and Regent.

The novel opens with the Prologue which describes Maharajah of Balmer's thrilling Shikar of the biggest panther. After the prologue, the readers witness Maharajah's joy because of the birth of a son and grief due to the severe famine which begins in 1898 and lasts for seven years. Jai Singh's endeavors to gain help from the Emperor in London for the famine-ridden people are futile. Later on, he enforces Maharani to break purdah and assists in famine relief. Finally, Jai Singh sells Blamer Navratan to Tsar and thus raises money for his subjects.

Meanwhile Maharani gives birth to a daughter who is named Jaya. While growing, Jaya receives contrast education, her father trains her in manly fields like shikar and rajniti. On the contrary, her mother enforces her to learn womanly arts like music and sola shringar.

Being under dominance of Angrez Jai Singh has to appoint two tutors to teach his children English, Captain Osborne for his son Tikka and Mrs. Roy for his daughter, Jaya. Mrs. Roy, the staunch nationalist tries to enkindle the flame of nationalism in her heart. Maharajah sends Tikka to England for further education only due to the threat of dethronement.

Freedom struggle starts in its earnest and Indian people start to boycott the English goods. Nevertheless, the coronation of George V takes place in Delhi. In 1914, the First World War breaks out and by March 1915, millions of Indians join the army to defend British Empire including Tikka and 300 Balmer lancers. Maharani who is too worried for her son's security comes in contact with Sati Mata who predicts Jaya's marriage with great ancient sword and the smashing of Balmer nagaras.

Sati Mata's prediction proves true as Tikka is killed in the disastrous war. Unable to bear the loss of the only son, Maharaja died and old nagaras of Balmer are smashed. Raja Mansingh, the cousin of Jai Singh raises his son John to the

Balmer gadi. Humiliations are heaped upon Maharani and Maharajah of Dunga takes her to his kingdom as his sister.

In 1919, Jaya is married by Proxy to Prince Pratap of Sirpur while King George issues a royal proclamation. The British Government passes the Rowlatt Act and it has nationwide drastic reactions. The horrible massacre at Amritsar follows severe public agitations. Moreover, Indian National congress demands full responsible government in contrast to the Emperor's proclamation.

In Sirpur, Jaya is thrown in the vale of grief due to Pratap's disinterestedness in her, as a wife. Pratap and Lady Modi modernize her so that she can welcome Prince of Wales. When the Royal guest arrives, instead of dancing, Jaya, courageously accepts playing polo with him.

Jaya goes to Calcutta and gets shocked to see the morally degraded status of the Royal families and the Europeans. Afterwards, she is surprised to meet the nationalistic leaders. In Calcutta, the newspaper, 'Bombay Chronicle' publishes the letter which reveals Jaya's tale of woe. Jaya's grief is unfathomed for she has spent five married years without being united with her husband. On the contrary he spends nights 'in the arms of the women like the dancer Esme Moore.'

Jaya, escorted with her husband and brother-in-law visits London, Hers is the well prepared and gracious presentation appreciated by all. Jaya feels too miserable when her tender brother-in-law, Maharajah Victor has suicidal death because of his love affair with Cora Hart, the film actress.

After Pratap's coronation, as the king of Sirpur, Jaya's long waiting comes to an end, she is united but not satisfied with her husband.

The Viceroy arrives at Sirpur to install Pratap as the Chief of Sirpur. Jaya is infuriated to see that Pratap incurs biggest expenses for winning the approval of the British Empire. After the Viceroy's departure, Pratap also departs for Europe with Esme Moore.

Meanwhile Jaya begets a son and feels too overjoyed. Since Pratap is interested only in the material pleasures and aeroplanes, Jaya has to think seriously about the threat of the reformists to their kingdom. The emergence of Butler and Simon commissions alongwith the reformists make the king's condition worse. The reformist also hope that their campaign will force the Butler commission to demand reforms in royal India.

Suddenly, Jaya is informed that Esme Moore brings the pressure on Pratap to marry her with making use of their photographs and letters. Jaya goes to London and tackles the problem successfully, in turn she is named as the Regent Maharani by Pratap. Jaya is plunged in the Vale of misfortunes as her husband, Pratap dies in an air crash. Unfortunately her residency was challenged by Rajguru.

Maharajah Dungra invites Jaya to her kingdom for Jaya's mother wishes to see her grandson. Jaya's mother has come out of the shell of widowhood and she is serving the poor and the needy.

The political scenario is changing fast as Mahatma Gandhi launches the Civil Disobedience Movement against the British Empire. In 1930, he breaks the salt law with thousands of courageous satyagrahis. When Jaya starts for journey to Sirpur, Indian Republican Army captures Chittagong. However the British retakes it.

In 1931, Gandhiji attends the Second Round Table Conference and in 1932 Hindu-Muslim riots flares up throughout British India including Sirpur. Consequently, British Parliament agrees to an all India Federation. In 1935, Jaya has to suffer much, first due to her mother's death, secondly, because of the devastating earthquakes in Sirpur. All the situations become so grim that Jaya has to send her son Arjun to England for further education. In 1937 the viceroy gives ultimatum to the Indian rulers to join the federation. Indian hearts are filled

with nationalistic thoughts. Accordingly Sirpur people are also impressed by nationalist Arun Roy's speech.

In September 1939, the Second World War starts and in 1940, 3000 Sirpur lancers support England. The Indian National Congress launches the Civil Disobedience Movement and demanding full ruling powers from the viceroy. In 1942, the National Congress launches 'Quit India' movement. In the same year 18 year old Arjun joins the war and gets wounded in 1944. In 1945, Jinnah remains obdurate in his demands for Pakistan while Nahru maintains that only the National Congress will speak for India. Hindu-Muslim clashes increase day by day. Arjun is killed in Hindu-Muslim riots in Sirpur in 1946 and it makes Jaya too grief stricken. In 1947, India wins freedom but India and Pakistan become two separate nations.

The Indian rulers are asked to sign away their kingdoms and merge with India, Gandhi is assassinated brutally 5 months after Independence. In 1950, Jaya signs the Sirpur Instrument of Accession and the kingdom is merged with India. The novel ends with a happy note with Jaya's decision of being the candidate in the Sirpur election against Arun Roy.

### III. iii . GITA MEHTA'S RAJ AS A HISTORICAL NOVEL : HISTORICAL

#### REFERENCES

Raj is the pleasurable blending of fictitious story of Princess Jaya Devi and Indian freedom struggle. Here historical events are assimilated so homogeneously in the fictitious story that the separation of the both becomes too difficult. But so as to prove Raj as a historical novel, historicity in it must be taken into consideration. For this purpose, here historical events in Raj are chronologically taken out with their historical records, mention by the noted

historians such as V.D.Mahajan, S.B. Mookherji and Syed Jafar, Mahmud. The list of the historical events referred to Raj is as follows:

- 1) Calamity of famine in India (1897)
- 2) First World War (1914-18)
- 3) Rowlatt Act (1919)
- 4) Jalianwala Bag Massacre (1919)
- 5) Prince of Wales' visit to India (1921)
- 6) Simon Commission (1927-28)
- 7) Bomb explosion on Assembly (1929)
- 8) Demand for Complete Independence (1929)
- 9) Civil Disobedience Movement (1930)
- 10) Dandi Yatra (1930)
- 11) Attack on police armoury at Chittagong (1930)
- 12) The Second Round Table Conference (1931)
- 13) The Government of India Act (1935)
- 14) Second World War (1939-44)
- 15) Cripps mission (1942)
- 16) Quit India Movement (1942)
- 17) India wins Independence (1947)
- 18) The Integration of the Princely States (1950)

Historicity is the core of any historical novel. It is doubtless to say that Raj is the historical novel, as it properly maintains the element of historicity. Very beginning of the novel takes us to the land of Balmer which is troubled, due to famine. One might accept 'Balmer' state as Rajasthan due to the similarity in the sphere of social life in both states. Moreover famine is the resembling factor between these two states.

Mehta adheres to historical accuracy in Raj with the help of the calamity of famine, that emerges in Balmer. Through the conservation of bards and the gypsy genealogists the novelist suggests that after twenty years, the devastating famine has begun in Balmer. Maharajah Jai Singh leaves no stone unturned to assist the famine-ridden people. He also insists the Maharani to break the purdah and assist the famine ridden public as other queens in Rajputana come to help the subjects.

To determine Raj as the historical novel, Mehta narrates the event as:

Jai Singh tore the veil from her hands. 'Savage times require savage measures! Your sacrifice will not be unique. The tiger queen of Baroda has come out of purdah and is traveling in her country to assist the famine relief. The Regent of Jodhapur's wife has moved out of Jodhpur fort. Now she lives in a mud hut and cooks food for the droughts kitchens with her own lands. I require your presence in the camps. Ask yourself this, woman. What is more important, your veil or your people's despair.?' <sup>1</sup>

The occurrence of the famine can be examined with the help of record, kept by S.B. Mookherji. He writes:

Relief operations on an extensive scale were undertaken during the catastrophic famines of 1896-97 and 1899-1900 which affected 93.5 million people in the U.P., Bihar, the central provinces, Bombay, Madras, the Punjab, Baroda, Rajasthan and the central Indian principalities. According to Lord Curzon, twenty five percent of the people of India "had come to a greater or less degree within the radius of relief operations" during these famines. <sup>2</sup>



The above mentioned calamity of famine, recorded by Mookherji shows maximum resemblance with the event narrated by Gita Mehta. Even the mention of the year is also same as famine is described in Raj under the title of '1897'.

The second important event in the novel is that of the First World War between 1914 and 1918. The war affected destructively on the whole world. In those days, as India was under the British Crown, it was a must for her to support it with money and men. So as to bring about the historical element in the novel, Mehta writes:

For years Britain has promised to make India a Dominion, like Canada and Australia. Let us see if she fulfils her promises at last. After all, one and a quarter million Indians joined up to defend Britain's territories in 1915 and £ 100 million, was sent from India's exchequer as an outright gift to Britain. Since then India has paid Britain a further £ 30 million every year.<sup>3</sup>

Besides, the narrative describes protagonist's brother's active participation and miserable death in war. To justify this information as historically true, one has to see the details of the same event in historian's record. In this regard, Mookherji writes;

The great war had broken out in the meanwhile, India liberally helped Britain's war efforts with men and money. Crores of rupees were paid as loans and subscriptions. 1,697,416 Indians enlisted in the British army. The total enlistment in the British army, it may be noted in passing, was 9,500,000. 61,396 Indians laid down their lives in different theatres of

war. 70859 were wounded and 11,070 became prisoners of war.<sup>4</sup>

When we scrutinize the resemblance between these two records, we find the information provided in Raj is before the ending of the war. It is doubtless to say that the numbers must have increased afterwards. Though the information provided by Mehta and the historical record mentioned by Mookherji differ in the numbers, the information resembles strikingly.

In 1919, British Government offers the elected representatives of the people a definite share in the Government. But in the same year, Government passed the Rowlatt Act which was condemned as a black act by the Indians. To describe the power of this act, Mehta writes :

Rowlatt Acts under which Indians could be tried in special British courts with no right of appeal. Anyone believed to constitute a threat to the peace was to be detained in jail or in the dreaded penal colony in the Andaman Islands, where prisoners were kept in chains, often for the duration of their ten and fifteen year sentences. Those Indians who published or circulated documents which British believed to be seditious could be imprisoned indefinitely.<sup>5</sup>

The same record can be compared with the historical record maintained by V.D. Mahajan reads as follows :

The act was very drastic one. It gave the Government powers to crush popular liberties, to arrest and detain suspected

persons without warrant and to imprison them without regular trial <sup>6</sup>

The careful study of these two literary pieces put Raj in the category of historical novel.

As soon as this black act was declared, people turned furious. All over India, people opposed the act through strikes and demonstrations. Jalianwala Bag massacre which followed the act was the height of ruthlessness of General Dyre to crush the reaction to the law. Mehta depicts the event thus:

A mass meeting was held in Amritsar to protest General Dyre's ordinance. Armed troops surrounded the walled park where the meeting was taking place, and blocked the park's only exit. No warning was given to the crowd to disperse. On General Dyre's orders the troops fired directly at unarmed men, women and children. Every bullet, of each round fired, killed or wounded a demonstrator. Subsequently, no assistance was rendered to the wounded. <sup>7</sup>

General Dyre, while committing such sins is no less than a devil. Mehta picturises the whole event so artistically and with humanitarian view that our hearts are filled with sympathy for the victims in the massacre.

To find out the historicity, on the part of Mehta as a historical novelist, V.D. Mahajan historical record should be taken into consideration. He writes:

The Jalianwala Bagh is closed practically on all sides by walls excepting one narrow entrance to it. General Dyre entered the Jallianwala Bagh with armoured cars and troops. Without giving any warning to the people to disperse, he ordered the

troops to fire and he continued to do so till the whole of the ammunition at his disposal was exhausted. Hundreds of people were killed <sup>8</sup>

Height of the cruelty is that No arrangements were made by the authorities to look after the dead or wounded. The description of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre, written by Geeta Mehta resembles completely with that of V.D. Mahajan's.

The tragedy of the Jalianwala Bag makes deep impact on the masses. Though, during the First World War Indians sacrificed greatly, Englishmen behaved brutally. Muslims also nourished strong resentment in their hearts for the British. All these circumstances have agitated the masses consequently, congress leaders, including Gandhiji, decided not to co-operate with the British Government thereafter. Eventually, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Non Co-operation Movement. In this regard, Mehta writes:

Muslim leaders called upon all believers to stop working for British Empire, and Gandhiji launched a nationwide non-cooperation Movement to show Indian displeasure with what was being called the black act of the British Raj.<sup>9</sup>

After taking into consideration the record kept by Syed Jafar Mahmud, one can examine the historicity in the above paragraph. Mahmud maintains:

"The events of 1919 had already sown the seeds of non-cooperation with the British Government. The Punjab and Khilaphat wrongs thereafter convinced Gandhiji that 'Co-operation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful ... His historical resolution on non-cooperation was

passed by the Congress in 1920 in its Calcutta and Nagpur sessions.<sup>10</sup>

The above mentioned declaration of launching the Non-Cooperation Movement is identical to that of one depicted by Gita Mehta. The only difference between these two pieces of descriptions is that Mahmud mentions details including, Punjab and Khilaphat wrongs while Mehta describes the core of the movement.

Prince of Wales visited India in 1921. Though Royal India takes much efforts to greet him, British India behaved contradictorily. The change in public mentality is reported through Lady Modi. She says :

I mean only 10 years ago we were all so thrilled by the imperial Durbar when his father was crowned Emperor of India. And now the glamorous Prince of Wales is being met by silent crowds wearing black armbands and Gandhi caps.<sup>11</sup>

Later on, while describing the violence caused by the arrival of Prince of Wales, Mehta writes:

How else do you explain the violence when the Prince of Wales arrived in Bombay? Thugs beating up anyone who wasn't wearing a black armband, mobs burning and looting shops, setting union, jacks on fire.<sup>12</sup>

The historical factuality of the above reaction can be judged through the record kept by V. D. Mahajan as :

In November 1921, the Prince of Wales came to India to thank the people for their " magnificent contribution" to the

British war effort. However, when he landed in Bombay, there was complete hartal. There were clashes, rioting and bloodshed. Fifty three persons lost their lives and 400 were wounded as a result of firing by the police. " <sup>13</sup>

When we compare these two pieces of information, close resemblance is brought out. Only the historian's record provides the details of the violent welcome, offered to Prince while Mehta's description gives just the idea of it.

Simon Commission arrived in India in 1928, to study the possibility of offering self-government to British India. Seven English men were appointed on the commission, void of any Indian. So the Congress boycotted the commission.

Mehta depicts the event as:

A group of men wearing white Gandhi caps and carrying black flags appeared at the bend of the road. The truck braked. The impatient contractor jumped down and the demonstrators struggled to keep their banners from falling onto his head as Jaya read the slogans on the banner

GIVE INDIA DOMINION STATUS NOW

SELF- GOVERNMENT FOR INDIA

SIMON COMMISSION. GO HOME. <sup>14</sup>

The description is so vivid that the scene appears in front our eyes. So as to verify it with history we have to take into consideration the historical record, maintained by V.D. Mahajan as:

The Simon Commission was appointed by the Government in 1927 in accordance with the statutory provisions of the Government of India Act 1919. These was a lot of hue and cry in India on account of the all white composition of the

commission. The commission was boycotted by the Indians. Hartals were held all over the country. The members of the Simon commission were asked to go back.<sup>15</sup>

The content of the two descriptions is the same. The only difference is that the novelist handles the event artistically and the historian presents it just as a historical record.

The next important event in the freedom struggle, covered in the novel is the bomb explosion on assembly on 8 April 1929 by the revolutionaries named as Batukeshwar Dutt and Bhagat Singh, Mehta describes this event as:

In April, on the very day of Arjun's fourth birthday, the rage of India found alarming expression. While the Viceroy was sitting on his scarlet and gold viceregal throne in the Legislative Assembly, a bomb was thrown from the visitor's gallery into the treasury Benches, crowded with Englishmen. The bomb was designed to do no damage, but the implication of widespread insurrection shook the Empire.<sup>16</sup>

Mehta also quotes the words uttered by Bhagat Singh in Delhi Courtroom as:

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.<sup>17</sup>

In the light of the historian's record, one can examine the historical element in it. V.D. Mahajan writes:

After the question hour was over in the Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi, Sardar Bhagat Singh threw a bomb

on the wall which exploded with a thundering boom. Two bullets were fired to frighten the speaker of the House.”<sup>18</sup>

While assessing the similarity between these two records, we come to know that Mehta's depiction sticks to historicity. Moreover, the brilliant fusion of fiction and fact is that the above revolutionary event takes place on the birthday of Jaya's son.

The next significant event, described in the novel is the demand for Complete Independence declared by Indian National Congress, in December 1929, at Lahore :

The National Congress is going to snub the king Emperor. They refuse to attend the Round Table conference in London.<sup>19</sup>

The further explanation is provided as:

...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. The cat is really among the pigeons now, darling. Terrorists will be exploding bombs. We will have to burn all our gowns and wear that awful scratchy homespun cotton.”<sup>20</sup>

Though these words, uttered by anti-nationalist, Lady Modi, lacks in fiery fervor, those are useful in informing the readers about history.



The historicity of the above description can be judged with the help of the historical record maintained by Syed Jafar Mahamud. He writes:

.... The Congress at Lahore, in December 1929, under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru declared Complete Independence as the goal, decided to boycott the Round Table Conference and took steps to launch a programme of Civil Disobedience.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the description given by Mehta has striking resemblance with that of Mahamud.

Indian Freedom struggle was in full swing. Indians were ready to do anything to shake off the shackles of British Empire. The impressive leader of the masses, Gandhiji launched the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930.' In this regard, Mehta quotes Mahatma Gandhiji's words as:

" On bended knee I asked for bread and I received stone instead."<sup>22</sup>

To examine the fidelity of the above statement, we have to take into consideration the following paragraph maintained by S.B. Mookherji:

The All India Congress Committee met in February (14-16) and authorised Gandhiji to start Civil Disobedience. The government had in the meanwhile set in motion the steam roller of repression. Subhashchandra Bose and many others were sent to jail. In a long letter to Viceroy, Gandhiji recounted the tale of India's ruin under British rule. The Viceroy curt a rust reply. Gandhiji declared, "On bended

knees I asked for bread and received a stone instead ....  
India is a vast prison-house.<sup>23</sup>

If we judge the resemblance between the information, provided in Raj and the historical record maintained by S.B. Mookherje, we find out that Mehta has studied the major as well as minor references, in the freedom struggle and is genius enough to use them wherever necessary.

Dandi Yatra is the integral part of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the fictitious story of Raj, as it is shown that, Jaya's mother, later known as Satimata is also active participant in Dandi Yatra. Mehta describes Dandi Yatra as:

In three weeks Gandhiji had already walked more than two hundred miles from his ashram towards the seacoast at Dandi where he planned to break the British Empire's laws. Indians had flocked to join the elderly ascetic's march, until his small band of workers had swollen from hundreds to thousands to tens of thousands.<sup>24</sup>

Mehta further writes:

In Calcutta, the Mayor gave a public Speech urging people to stop wearing British made textiles. He was jailed. In Delhi, fifteen thousand men and women watched the police arrest of Pandit Malviya as he bought a handful of salt. At Patna, thousands waited to make salt under the direction of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Mounted Police blocked the high way, threatening a cavalry charge, and the men and women who had thrown themselves on the ground in front of the horses

were dragged away, only to be replaced by new waves of volunteers." <sup>25</sup>

Mehta creates a pen picture of Satyagraha, in which people participated with full devotion to Gandhiji and his principles of truth and non-violence. Her success in portraying the satyagraha, as a part of Civil Disobedience is noteworthy.

Thus, historical element in Raj can be examined, on the standard of the record kept by S.B. Mookherji in the following way:

Gandhiji's historic march to Dandi, which started on April 6, 1933, opened a new phase of India's fight for freedom. The era of non-co-operation was at an end. That of Civil Disobedience began. A mighty mass movement involving strikes, the boycott of British goods and acts of lawlessness and organized violence, these last against the leader's desire swept over the country.<sup>26</sup>

The comparison between these two records show sheer resemblance which makes the readers to accept Raj as a historical novel.

The next revolutionary action that follows the above incident is the attack on police armoury at Chittagong by the Indian Republican Army in April 1930. As the British threw Mahatma Gandhi into jail, People reacted violently. Attack on Chittagong was such a revolutionary action. Gita Mehta writes:

...The Indian Republican Army has captured Chittagong.'  
 Captured Chittagong?' Jaya repeated like a parrot 'How can a handful of poets take one of the most important cities in the British Empire by force.?'

The British are not releasing any information, but Mrs. Roy received the news by telephone.<sup>27</sup>

It is quite shocking for Jaya that a few poets can capture the most important place. The revolutionary event shows that every level in society was active in freedom struggle including the tender minded poets too.

To examine the historicity of the above description, we can take help of the historical record kept by V.D. Mahajan. He says :

An armed uprising was attempted in the part of Chittagong in East Bengal by youngmen led by Surya Sen, the terriost leader. The plan was to launch simultaneous attacks on British armouries in East Bangal. Ambika Chakraborty Loka Nath Bal and Ganesh Ghosh, his lieutenants, mobilised local college and school students, including young boys like Ananda Gupta and Tegra (Tiger), Bal and young women like Kalpana Dutt and Pritilata Wadedar.<sup>28</sup>

The above mentioned information is identical to the event narrated by Gita Mehta. The only difference is that, Mahajan writes the names of the youth, who participated in Chittagong attack whereas Mehta just mentions the event mingling it with imaginative story.

Though earlier Gandhiji rejected to attend the first Round Table Conference, he agreed to attend the second Round Table Conference as the only representative of the Congress. Mehta inserts this historic event, in imaginative thread of Raj and it is shown that Purdah ladies are also exuberent to know the news. But the conference is unsuccessful. Mehta writes:

In spite of Gandhiji's presence, this second Round Table Conference has been a failure. An ugly battle has been joined between the national Congress and the Muslim League, and it will lead to bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>29</sup>

To assess this event historically, we can take into consideration the historical record, kept by V.D. Mahahan. He writes:

Mahatma Gandhi attended the Second Round Table conference as the sole representative of the Congress. However, nothing could be achieved on account of the attitude of Mr. Jinnah. It was found that it was impossible to have any agreed formula with regard to the representation of the various communities.<sup>30</sup>

The Second Round Table conference was a complete failure for India. Congress did not participate in the Third Round Table Conference. In the course of time, in 1932, a group of young Muslims coined the new name of the country as 'Pakistan'. The differences between the Hindus and the Muslims went on increasing. Moreover, acute Civil Disobedience Movement weakened the once mighty British Empire. All this political scenario makes the British Parliament to agree on All India Federation in which Indian representatives will administrate India alongwith the Viceroy. The same act is welknown as 'The Government of India Act.' Mehta informs about this act through Jame Osborne. He tells Jaya:

The rulers are being offered a very powerful position in the federation.... Parilament's Government of India Act has proposed an upper house in which the rulers will hold half a seats and a lower house in which the rulers will hold one third

of the seats. These two houses, together will govern the whole of India, but the kingdoms will remain intact.<sup>31</sup>

The examination of the above paragraph in regard to historicity can be done with reference to S.B. Mookherji. He writes:

In the First Round Table Conference in London in 1930, the Princes agreed to join an all-India Federation, if and when it came into existence. The Principle was included in the Government of India Act 1935. The Princes were to nominate one-third of the members of the Lower House (The Federal Assembly) and two-fifth of the members of the upper house (The Council of State) of the Federal legislature envisaged in the Act. Accession to the proposed federation was to be optional.<sup>32</sup>

*there are*

It appears that <sup>^</sup>remarkable identical references in the records, maintained by the two writers.

The political situation in India became grim. Agitations were launched against Royal Kings and the British on a larger scale. To make the matters worse, the Second World War erupted and Britain enforced Indians to participate in the war. But, Congress firmly reiterated that Indians must not be sent to fight on the Britain's battle fields. Gita Mehta reflects the views of National Congress on Britain's war policy by making use of the newspaper 'Sirpur Herald'. It focuses on the following headlines.

If the war is to defend imperialist possessions, then India can have nothing to do with it. A slave India cannot help Britian.

... How long must the poverty - stricken millions of India pay the cost at Britain's wars? <sup>33</sup>

To find out the accuracy, in these headlines, it is proper to mention the historical record, maintained by V.D. Mahajan. He writes:

On 1 September 1939, the Second World War began. On 3 September' 1939, the Viceroy of India declared war against Germany, without consulting or taking into confidence the Indian leaders. Indian troops were sent to the various theatre of war for the defense of the British Empire. <sup>34</sup>

Careful examination of Mehta's record and the record maintained by Mahajan shows the remarkable resemblance.

When England was waging a war in the east, in 1942, the freedom struggle in India was becoming more revolutionary. To protect India as a colony henceforth, the British rulers decided to appoint Mr. Cripps for political purpose. Mehta describes it as:

To ensure the continued cooperation of Indians, Churchill dispatched Sir Stratford Cripps, Leader of the House of Commons and a member of Britain's wartime cabinet, to offer Indians the chance to frame the Constitution of India themselves. <sup>35</sup>

So as to point out the historical accuracy in the Cripps Mission, one has to take into consideration the historical record, maintained by V.D. Mahajan. He writes:

In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, the leader of the house of Commons, came to Delhi with Proposals on behalf of the British Government. The following is the text of the Draft Declaration of the British Government brought by Cripps to India :-

Immediately upon cessation at hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new constitution for India.<sup>36</sup>

The comparison between the record, kept by Mehta and the record, kept by Mahajan put forth the former as historically accurate.

Congress refused to accept Cripps proposals. India was burning with rage against the British and in such atmosphere, Congress passed the 'Quit India' resolution which demanded that the British must leave India at their earliest and that British rule in India should be ended. Gita Mehta writes:

As the spectre of famine swept eastern India, worsened by fears of Japanese occupation in a war that was not India's choosing, the Indian National Congress launched a Quit India Movement, urging all Indians to cease co-operating with the British war effort immediately.<sup>37</sup>

To find out the historical accuracy in the above description one should consider the historical record mentioned by the historian . In this regard V.D. Mahajan writes:

The Quit India Resolution declared that " The immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity, both for



the sake of India for the success of the cause of the united Nations. ...The ending of British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depends the future of the war and thus the success of freedom and democracy." <sup>38</sup>

Mehta's depiction of 'Quit India Movement' is identical with the depiction of the same, done by V.D. Mahajan. Only difference is that, Mehta has not given much details take cause of the United Nations.

The 'Quit India Movement' though did not make Britain to quit India immediately, it paved way to Indian Independence. Meanwhile, the Second World War proved an unmitigated disaster for India.' In 1944, after having much harm to world peace, the war ended. From 1945, British Government gave preference to India's continuous demand for freedom. The gap between Muslim League and National Congress widened greatly. Whole India was burning with the flames of Hindu Muslim riots. Muslims, under the leadership of Jinnah were observed to win 'Pakistan' as the separate country. Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India declared the Interim Government amidst such chaotic atmosphere of religious hatred and bloodshed. Finally in 1947, British Parliament declared The Indian Independence Act and India became independent with the grim Partition of 'Pakistan' Mehta writes:

The British Empire's partition awards were published, and within hours Jaya's fears turned into sickening reality as the Indians and Pakistanis who had so deliriously hoisted their own flags on the Empire's Flagstaffs became intoxicated again, not by freedom, but by uncontrollable savagery. <sup>39</sup>

For the purpose of discovering the historicity in the above description, one has to take into consideration the historical record maintained by V.D. Mahajan.

He writes:

The Indian Independence Act of 1947 was a great landmark in the Anglo - Indian relations. It marked the ending of British rule in India, It was a recognition of the right of the Indians to be free. But unfortunately, it devided India into two parts: India and Pakistan. <sup>40</sup>

The event, depicted by Gita Mehta resembles with the event depicted by V.D.Mahajan.

In Independent India, the Iron Man Of India, Sardar Vallabhbai Patel appealed the rulers to merge with free India. In this regard, Mehta writes,

.... Almost a million people have been killed, another seven million made homeless. The rulers could start hundreds of new civil wars. They have their own armies. They could cut India's railway network, its telegraph and communications system. That is why the rulers are being asked to sign an Instrument of Accession and merge with India. <sup>41</sup>

To assess the historical accuracy in the above paragraph, it is proper to reiterate the Paragraph maintained by S.B.Mookherji. He writes:

"British Paramountcy, over the rulers of the Native States ceased to be operative after the transfer of power to India and newly created Pakistan in mid August 1947. Some of the Princes interpreted the tapes of Paramountcy to mean that

they could become Sovereign rulers. But the pressure, of history demanded that they line up with India or Pakistan. The Method devised to facilitate this association with the Indian Union was the 'Instrument of Accession' by which the States would become part of the Indian Union and hand over to the Central Government their powers in respect of defence, foreign affairs and communications.<sup>42</sup>

Mehta's description about the integration of states and Mookherji's description about the same, genuinely resemble.

As a Regent Maharani, Jaya Devi signs an Instrument of Accession and old state of Sirpur is merged with India. The eve of democracy in India is shown with Jaya Devi's participation in election as an independent candidate. Thus, with this new beginning, the novel ends in an optimistic note.

One can perceive the historicity in Raj through various perspectives. As a historical record of 'British Raj' , Raj covers British reign in India from 1897 to 1947, from Lord Curzon to Lord Mountbatten. Minute details of 'British Raj' in the above mentioned period are revealed in the novel. i.e. Coronation of King George in Delhi, China War. etc. 'Royal India' is picturised realistically in Raj with the whims and fancies of the kings.

The Voluntary reaction of the masses, to the slavery of 'British Raj is freedom struggle. In Raj, Indian freedom struggle is depicted minutely with nationalistic perspective. The national leaders are shown in their own historical period i.e. The emergence of Gandhiji on national horizon is shown after Lokmanya Tilak.

Thus, in each and every aspect Raj can be categorized as a historical novel.

### III. iv. SOCIO-CULTURAL RECREATION IN RAJ

Gita Mehta's Raj, which is a finer fusion of personal as well as national elements covers the crucial historical period from 1897 to 1950. Mehta is aware of the fact that history without fictionality does not capture the reader's attention. Consequently, she portrays the protagonist, Jaya's tale of woe alongwith the background of Indian freedom struggle.

Moreover, the novel is recognized as the historical novel only with the vivid and colourful depiction of the contemporary society, described in it. Editors of 'Essays in Honour of Prof. K. Ayyappa Paniker' advocate the same idea further.

They write.:

It is generally accepted that the history of a people is not merely a story of their military expeditions and exploits, their conquests and defeats or a chronicle of events or an account of succession, intrigues and power politics, but more importantly the knowledge of how people lived: their family life and social relationship, religious beliefs and customs, rituals and festivals, myths and legends, arts and crafts<sup>43</sup>

After a careful deep study of Raj one has to admit that Raj has the profusion of such socio-cultural concerns. It is a carefully woven record of contemporary education, customs, religion, spirituality, festivals, relationship between the Royal India and the British India and finally, successful Indian struggle.

Since ancient times, Rajniti, a philosophy of monarchy is taught to Indian princes and princesses from their early childhood. The same Rajniti, in regard to socio-political decisions occupies vital role in the novel from its beginning to the end. The novel opens and ends with the principle of Rajniti. In the prologue,

Maharajah Man Singh who is unlike other frivolous and happy-go-lucky kings, advises his kids;

Rulers are men and men are always frightened. A man cannot govern unless he confronts his own fears.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the novel, it is revealed that the protagonist, Jaya, according to her father's advice confronts her own fears making successful use of 'Rajniti' whenever necessary. When Jaya applies for candidateship in the Sirpur election, she thinks with nostalgia of the childhood lessons in Rajniti. Mehta writes:

...Jaya remembered the Raj Guru's harsh whisper under the painted frescoes of the fort library demanding, "What is the first principle of Rajniti Bai-sa?" and her stuttering reply, 'The people' <sup>45</sup>

Here, the writer also declares the supremacy of 'Rajniti' over democracy as the latter one is considered to be taught to the Indian rulers by the British Empire and nationalists respectively.

Mehta highlights the degraded status of women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including customs of polygamy, the pardah, early marriages, sati and most humiliating and lifelong widowhood Prof. K.R. Shirwadkar has remarked thus:

What appears to be surprising is that not a word was said against woman's total enslavement for about 2000 years. <sup>46</sup>

Against such background, the protagonist, Jaya emerges as a modern woman for she is well educated in Rajniti, horse-riding, polo, shikar and also English. It is the reason why her conventional mother complains:

Who will marry such an over educated girl? Her in-laws will resent her. Her husband will be insulted when she flaunts her learning in front of her. <sup>47</sup>

'Pardah' is one of the most humiliating custom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially for the royal ladies. Its prominence can be judged by Maharani's reaction after listening to the Maharaja's command to break Purdah so as to assist the famine-ridden subjects. It is picturised as:

When Jai Singh did not reverse his command, she pulled the veil from her head, holding the two edges in her outstretched hands to make a begging bowl, "Hukam, ask anything from me but this. <sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, the old revered concubine, Kuki Bai forwards the need for change in the tradition. Through her advice, she fuses a new spirit into Maharani's mind as :

You must learn to bend with the times, or you will snap in two like an old neem twig. <sup>49</sup>

Afterwards, Maharani is transformed into the grave symbol of widowhood. After the death of Maharajah Jai Singh, humiliations are heaped upon her. The description is realistic as well as pathetic which shows the peculiarity of the contemporary society. As Mehta puts it:

Crowds of men thronged the corridors. Seeing the Maharani's bared head, shown of its hair, they crushed together, away from the pollution cast by a widow. Inside the zenana, it was

as though every old woman in the kingdom had crowded into the marble halls to scream at the Maharani: Unfortunate woman, your life has ended! widow! you are unclean! Widow !<sup>50</sup>

Such painstaking descriptions, full of pathos, suggest that the widowhood is no less than the curse. Mehta reveals such events so realistically that they become the pen-pictures of the contemporary society.

In ancient male-dominated society, the woman had to sacrifice bangles, hair, sindur and everything that is pleasurable after the death of her husband. It is widely accepted by all that woman has no identity after the loss of her husband. So, ten years after above mentioned event, Jaya has to face same ordeal after her husband's death. Mehta writes,

There were no glass bangles to be slipped onto her wrists, no long minutes spent combing the thick hair that had once fallen to her knees, no sindur to mark the circle of matrimony on her forehead. She did not even have to cover her shaved head. A widow was not considered desirable, only unlucky<sup>51</sup>

The Sati system, which was prevalent in ancient India is mentioned in this novel every now and then through the ideal queen, Pushavati's example as,

Why did Queen Pushavati remain a living widow? She was the most valiant and honourable of Rajput women. It was her duty and her honour to mount the funeral pyre first.<sup>52</sup>

It suggests the glorification of sati system. The contemporary society regards that woman has no right to live once her husband, her ultimate power is

dead. In the novel, there is also the mention of sati temple, where Jaya , in her childhood goes to take sati vows.

Raj is also remarkable for the cultural aspect, mingled too intricately in it, through occasional mention of rangoli, classical songs, tribal dance and festivals. Colourful depiction of all these aspects show the glorious cultural life in India.

Rangoli delights human mind and has the symbolic significance in Indian culture. In her childhood, Jaya learns rangoli designs from her baron. i.e. mango designs for the spring festival and clay lamps for Divali pujas.

The classical music is one of the gifts of our ancestors. The music has soothing power which transcends mere entertainment. Mehta describes the power of singing as,

As the music gained momentum, Jaya thought she could hear what she had never heard ; breaking monsoons, peacock's dancing, trees bending under torrential rain. The harsh rage of the raga of fire, the melodic pleading of the raga of rain rose through the night. The ragas ended and although the crowded courtyard was not drenched with rain, there seemed to be a coolness in the wind blowing over the stone battlements.<sup>53</sup>

In the pre-independence period, prior to the arrival of radio and gramophone, people get recreation through cultural programmes and festivals.

Festivals lessen the load of tension and sorrow and enliven the human hearts with pure joy. Manwar ceremony is the fine example of such festivity. It is the celebration of Rajputana warrior caste, marked by music, opium and lethargy.



Gita Mehta brings the poetic element in it as :

For so long the great warrior  
 Has tried to enter the magic garden  
 To speak of love to the lovely woman  
 But she will only let him  
 knock  
 knock  
 knock  
 at her gate. <sup>54</sup>

Dasara, one of the Hindu festivals is celebrated with great zeal and zest which is described by the novelist quite artistically. Here, Maharaj Jai Singh's superstitious mind disturbs the readers. When Maharajah sacrifices the ram at the altar in front of the Goddess, Maharani says:

The sacrifice was not performed with a single stroke, the Maharani repeated like an incantation, 'Therefore the sacrifice is unholy.' <sup>55</sup>

Here, one finds the royal though imaginary personages breathe the age with their own beliefs and superstitions.

The writer does not neglect spirituality which has been the peculiar trait of Indian society since early days. So as to bring it in the novel, the novelist creates the personage of ascetic Satimata with full literary power. Ascetic's great penance and supernatural power have fascinated Indians as well as foreigners in the days of British rule. This Sati mata while sitting on the tiger's skin, with a

cobra nearby, inserts moral perspective into the conventional concept of Sati. She tells:

The title Sati should not be given to a woman who burn herself, but to a woman of virtue. And the greatest virtue is endurance.<sup>56</sup>

The meeting between, Maharani and Sati Mata is the most horrible and hair raising episode in the novel. Sati Mata further prophesies to Maharani:

You will also be known as a Sati, Mata Maharani-Sahib. When the nagaras of Balmer fort are smashed before your eyes.<sup>57</sup>

In the course of time, every prediction told by Sati Mata proves true, including Jaya's marriage by proxy. Maharani becomes Sati Mata who devotes her life for the welfare of the poor in the kingdom of Tiny Dungra. Moreover, she actively follows Gandhiji's path of satyagrah in the freedom struggle.

In those days, the most humiliating customs on the part of the princes is to get married to the sword of the prince. Though Jaya is married in the same way, the novelist provides every marriage ritual so as to take the readers in the Rajputana grandeur. The marriage ceremony ends as,

Weighed down by her garments, she passed her forehead to the hilt of Prince Pratap's sword, as she would have pressed her head to prince Pratap's feet, had he been there.<sup>58</sup>

Contemporary society was remarkably busy in performing rituals, pujas and fasting. The novel too reflects the same aspect recurringly. Throughout the

narrative, Jaya seeks solace in puja and fasting. It is obvious when Jaya has to depart for London. Mehta writes:

As the departure for London drew closer, Jaya became fearful that some demonic power destroyed those who associated too closely with the West and she fasted and elongated her pujas with renewed fervour, hoping piety would somehow insulate her from the terrors of crossing the dark waters.<sup>59</sup>

Her mentality represents the superstitious minds of the people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that crossing the sea is the great sin. Same fear is transparent in Chandni's words:

I beg you, don't take me to London, Lukam. The Angrez will pollute me.<sup>60</sup>

The Gange's water is revered as the purest water which only can remove the pollution caused due to the contact of British people. Eventually, Chandani is ready to accompany her mistress if they will take enough Gange's water in voyage. Mehta's realistic portrayal of such minor characters, nourished in Hinduism makes the novel thoroughly historical. The impact of religion on other contemporary queens is drawn as:

Sitting at her pujas at dawn, she could hear ringing bells and chanting voices, from adjoining rooms, indicating that the other royal women were also at their pujas and all down the thickly carpeted corridor, incense smoke escaped from under cabin doors.<sup>61</sup>

One of the aim of writing Raj is to put forth the exorbitant life style of buoyant Maharaj as in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are mainly busy in shikar, sex and enjoying highly luxurious life. They spend money lavishly while imitating European life style. Having no regard for motherland, they follow modern values which were all in all for them. Raj is quite successful in depicting this history with realistic view. While highlighting this aspect, the nationalist Aurn Roy addresses in Sirpur:

Must we be condemned to slavery because five hundred foolish men and women, lost in dreams of harems and shikars and foreign cities cannot see that human beings have a right to be consulted about the conduct of their own affairs?<sup>62</sup>

Fidelity is expected on the part of the queen but the king is allowed to have physical relations with too many women in his harem. These concubines were the neglected part of the society and had no business instead of waiting for the king's occasional arrival. Even the school going princes are seduced by the concubines. Jaya as well as readers are shocked when Dowager Maharani says:

But each time the boys returned to Sirpur, I told the younger concubines to remind them of their own customs.”<sup>63</sup>

'The boys' mentioned here are Prince Victor and Pratap, who spend their days in chesing white women in adulthood.

Pratap is the representative of the contemporary kings who while well coming the 20<sup>th</sup> century resent old traditional value. His elder brother Maharajah Victor is vein but tender and gentle.

Prince Prartap is neither a loyal husband nor a dutiful king. In his view life is nothing but a source of pleasure i.e. taking dangerous flights in air. Jaya, in a sentence describes him,

Danger is like a drug to my husband <sup>64</sup>

Hunting the wild animals was too natural for the royal families. To reveal the valour of the ruling members, Mehta describes 'shikar' of pig, panther and tiger. The novel has the element of adventure due to the detail descriptions of shikar in it. Mehta writes:

The sharp crackle of breaking sticks sounded behind her. Jaya swung around. The tiger had moved downwind to the elephant. Only a hundred feet away it was crouched on its powerful hind leg to spring. Without conscious instruction from her brain, Jaya squeezed the trigger. The tiger spun backward from the impact of the bullet and Jaya shut her eyes for a split second. When she opened them, the tiger was preparing to spring again. <sup>65</sup>

Visiting foreign cities is a fascination for the royal members. Pratap marries Jaya only for getting permission by the British rulers to travel abroad.

Raj is the fine record of the change in India due to the British Tradition loving Indians who become modern only due to the British rulers. They introduced railways, telegrams, aeroplanes to India though their view is that of the colonizers. This aspect becomes crystal clear when the noble tells Jai Singh:

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 distangle ourselves. <sup>66</sup>

Change comes in Jaya's life through marriage. The society in which Jaya is born and brought up is tradition-bound. On the other hand, the family, she has to accept after her marriage is busy in blind imitation of the British. Mehta picturaises this contrast minutely and studiously with the help of figurative words. At first, when as a bride, Jaya appears in front of Pratap, he tells her:

Wash all that nonsense off your hands and feet. And change out of these Christmas decoration. <sup>67</sup>

'The sola shringar' that she learns in Balmer, to attract her husband's attraction is mere 'Chirstmas decoration' for the same man. This is the impact of western way of living, in which Jaya is firmly forced afterwards. Moverover Gita Mehta presents her as a symbol of changing Indian lady. She has to remove Purdah, wear sari, learn the foreign languages, eat quail but forbid pan-eating habit. In brief, 'Raj' is the revelation of the fact, how modern etiquettes and manners replace tradition.

Though in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, kings had the hold over the subjects the British government had the ultimate power over the kings. This fact is recurrently depicted in the imaginative story of Jaya. Indians were mere puppets in the hands of British Empire. King Jai Singh angrily expresses such feelings to James Osborne as:

Justice, How the Angrez love that word. We had a system of justice once, captain. We had laws. But your Empire absorbed our armies, castrated our nobels, confused our

scholars, diminished our priests. You deposed the guardians of our laws left only- What is it you Angrez say? – the oriental despot. Any vice was smiled on by the British Raj except the vice of independence. You wander so confidently in the jungles of India. But what are you, Captain Sahib? Amateurs or criminals? Why do you not kill us instead of only wounding us. <sup>68</sup>

Here, through Jai Singh's anguish, Mehta puts forth the injustice done by the British to the Indian society. Jai Singh feels himself just like the wounded tiger, wounded at the hands of a British Shikari. The contemporary society, which was confused after the arrival of the British in India was rather in dilemma, whether to stick to the old traditional values or to accept modern values.

After Maharajah Victor's death, Pratap is raised to Gadi. Unless Angrez declare him a king, he cannot be the ruler of the oldest line of Sirpur. The British rulers exploit royal India as well as British India quite ruthlessly. Mehta writes:

The Angrez are worse than moneylenders. They steal everything we have and still say we are in their debt. <sup>69</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, newspapers occupies lion's share in inspiring common man with patriotic thoughts. Mehta mentions mainly two newspapers, as 'Sirpur Herald' and 'The Bombay Chronicle.'

Nationalism is the soul of any Indian novel concerning to British period. Raj is not exception to it. Every Indian heart is overbrimed with patriotism in those days. Mehta handles nationalism as well as reformist movement with the same artistic capacity. After 1920, the nationalistic movement became acute. Under the leadership of Gandhiji, people were doing every possible effort to free their

motherland from the shackle of slavery. This picture is reflected in the end of the novel. Sati Mata describes Satyagrah as:

I saw the British beat defenceless men with lathies 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 Baisa.<sup>70</sup>



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