

FICTIONALIZATION OF HISTORY IN JAYASREE MISRA'S NOVEL RANI

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Abstract: *The famous Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi is often celebrated as icon of our freedom struggle, symbol of bravery and a beacon of light. We have idolized her as a goddess- a role model for women, rarely trying to examine and even deliberately ignoring her human aspect. The novel traces all the historical events in Rani's life which form the skeletal framework of the manuscript but it goes beyond that to fill in the flesh and blood through the emotional turmoil and experiences of its characters. The present paper analyzes the mix of history with fiction in the novel Rani.*

Key words: *fictionalization, history, Jayasree Misra, Rani, anti colonial,*

Jaishree Mishra is a prominent writer of contemporary Indian English fiction. Her fourth novel *Rani* (2007) is an exemption from the rest of her works. The novel is about the life of Rani Lakshmi bai of Jhansi, the most glorious figure in Indian history in the background of the Revolution of 1857. The novel tries to explore the era through the eyes of Two main Characters Rani Lakshmi Bai and Major Ellis the regent of British East India company at Jhansi.

In an interview with Jaishree Mishra, (Bookshopblog.com) the question about the inspiration to choose this powerful life to write about Mishra says that “ she was a far more interesting character than the one-dimensional martial figure my school text books had told me of. I realized what a modern sensibility she was blessed with and was doubly fascinated how hard she tried not to go to war until pushed to the wall”.

The novel depicts the evolution of the little girl Manikarnika who called as Mani to the Rani of Jhansi. Mani is the name which Mishra deliberately changed from Manu the actual nickname of Rani to make her heroin free from the old conceptions. The novel begins with the happy childhood of Mani at the house of Peshwa. At peshwa house Nana Sahib and Tantia Toppe were said to be as Mani’s play mates and she got education as equal to her friends. According to the available historical documents birth place of manikarnika was at Varanasi, and her father Moropant Tambe was an adviser to Chimnaji Appa brother to Baji Rao II who was the last of the Maratha Peshwa . After the death of Chimnaji Appa, Manikarnika’s father moved to Bithur and become a member of the court of Baji Rao at her age of three. But Mishra shifted the palace of peshwa from Bithur to Varanasi for satisfactoriness the story. The history also admits that she was educated, but she got educated after her marriage with Gangadhar Rao, the Raja of Jhansi. But the possibility of Rani’s friendship with Nana and Tantia as play mates is renouncing because Nana was at least 7 or 8 years and Tantia was 14 years older than her and at this age when even a single year can make a big difference.

Manikarnika was married to Gangadhar Rao, Raja of Jhansi at her age of 14 and changed her name to Lakshmi bai. Even though There is no clear evidences available about her married life and her life in Jhansi , Jaishree Mishra empathetically portrayed her life with her creative power. The novel presents Rani as a dedicated wife, yet Gangadhar was not a devoted husband. She receives only a friendly affection rather than a husband’s love and she longs for a mundane life of an ordinary women. Mishra narrates it as ‘sometimes, even after she had drifted in to sleep,she would come awake with a start, imagining sounds of apporoaching footsteps. But so far Gangadhar had not made an appearance in her chamber and she was still not very sure whether to be upset by his absence or not’. (P.101.Mishra)

But Rani was allowed to interfere with the court administration. Mishra portrays Lakhmi bai as more a believer in friendly gestures of diplomacy in adjusts with the policies of her husband’s house rather than sword yielding actions. She described it as Ellis’s thoughts about rani. ‘He think it was not a bad thing to have the new queen involved in Jhansi’s administration but he needed to be sure that she was not going to interfere with the excellent camaraderie that had been carefully built up with the king’. (p.111, Mishra)

The novel keeps more integrity to the historical details about the story her son who died after 3 months of his birth which substantiates the memoir of Damodar Rao, her adapted son, published in 1959. When Raja Gangadhar fell ill and his death was expected Rani tried to convince him to adopt a son and they adopted 5 year old Anand Rao a member of Gangadhar’s extended family and named him as Damodar Rao, the name of Rani’s departed son. To ensure the British that the adoption was proper the local British officials, the political agent major Ellis and captain martin were called to witness the event. At the same time a will was prepared requesting the British to treat Damodar as the true son of Gangadhar and Lakshmi bai should be regent. The will was read to Ellis and repeated in a letter to the political agent for Gowlior and Bundelkhand Major Malcom. Gangadhar’s grandfather had previously signed a

treaty with the British which granted him and his successor's designation to Jhansi in perpetuity. However the rulers of Jhansi had been pro-British since that time of the initial treaty and it was not expected that there would be a problem with the succession. But the history of the succession had been complicated by this childless succession. The British East-India company declared that the kingdom of Jhansi would be annexed under the doctrine of lapse.

After the death of Gangadhar, Lord Dalhousie decided to seize the state of Jhansi. These years was a crucial period of Rani as well as Jhansi .She did not confined within the walls of the Zanana though she was a widow but she engaged to her duty of protecting her land. During this time it was Major Ellis the political agent of Jhansi give all his support to Rani both politically and emotionally. She shows interest in the company of Major Ellis. There develops an intimacy between Rani and Ellis and that relationship is the highlight of the novel *Rani*. Mishra portrayed it as an unexpressed and unfulfilled love story between the Queen and her political Agent. The best panorama of their love is perhaps the collapse of Rani for private weeping after a final goodbye to Ellis. There are several real historical records to prove the factual authenticity for their intimacy but there is a lot of fiction as well. The author has mentioned in an interview that only the name of English man is true, the rest is fiction. (The similar theme can be seen in Prince Michael's novel *Rani of Jhansi*, published by Rupa that the intimacy between Rani and a British Assistant Magistrate called Roger Giffard.)

Historically, the annexation of Jhansi according to the lapse happened in 1854, and it led Rani to make a rebellion against the British in 1857. The role of Rani in the rebellion of 1857 has been the subject of the great debate among modern historians as perhaps the nature of the rebellion itself .When Rani entered colonial memory as a cruel unwomanly killer of innocent women and children, Nationalist historians termed the rebellion as the first war of independence and tried to paint Rani as anti-British and anti colonial and tried to appropriate her as a symbol of nationalism and patriotic resistance. Other historians like R.C Manjumdar have rescued her from the nationalist paradigm and revealed her to be more of a reluctant rebel. In the novel Mishra depicting Rani as kind as to give food and shelter for the British women and children, and very friendly with the British officials and their families till the something went very wrong. This cannot be seen as reverse patriotism but the characterization of a great queen as someone with a great integrity and balance of judgment. She chooses the sword to fight as at last choice, till then she used her education and sense to read situations in the right perspectives. The novel sketches the Warrior queen's eventful life and says she actually stood for peace and harmony and was not the sword swinging heroin till she was hunted by the British for something she hadn't done.

Jaishree Mishra presented Rani not as the expected fiery and spontaneous heroin but as a sensible ruler whose patient wisdom holds her back from war till she is forced to jump in to the battle. She even keeps a distance from her childhood companions Nana and Tantia who have intolerance with the Britishers, till the very possible moment of war. When the Britishers attacked Jhansi, Rani decided not to surrender. She dressed as a man, took up arms, her son Damodar Rao was strapped tightly to her back Rani fought with deathless patriotism and martyrdom. But soon she realizes that it is really herself the British are after, if they have her, they will leave Jhansi alone. Therefore Rani left Jhansi, her beloved country.

The novel sense more honest with the historical evidences even though primary sources on Rani Lakshmi bai are not plentiful. The genre of historical fiction is usually considered as a fair game for writer imagination to fill the gaps left behind by recorded history. Jaishree mishra did this job of mixing history with her creative imagination to make Rani such a wonderful historical fiction. The novel is an attempt to explore a women rather than a brave warrior. Mishra succeeded in portraying the strong female character and the romantic inclination of the Rani and stimulates the attitude of women towards their responsibilities.

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