

LIFE WRITING: MONOGRAPH SERIES  
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**DECODING HISTORY AND  
DESIGNING CONCEPTS: THE  
RANI OF JHANSI IN THE PAST,  
THROUGH THE PRESENT,  
TOWARDS THE FUTURE**

**Swetha Chandran**

*Funded by UGC New Research Activity - Innovative Project  
“Autobiographies in Malayalam: Writing Lives, Writing History”*



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Present, towards the Future**



**Swetha Chandran** holds a doctoral degree from the University of Kerala. The PhD thesis titled *(Re) Visioning Rani Lakshmi Bai: Text and Context*, that focuses upon the historical queen, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi is based on the texts and contexts of history, literature and society amalgamating various theories in English literature. She has secured her M.Phil Degree in English Language and Literature in the subject of Egyptian History, submitting the thesis titled *Reflections of Reality: Exploring Egyptian Experience in Naguib Mahfouz's **The Cairo Trilogy***. She has published articles in reputed journals and presented papers at national and international conferences. Currently she lives in Mumbai.

The monograph titled *Decoding History and Designing Concepts: The Rani of Jhansi in the Past, through the Present, towards the Future* is an attempt to read the life and history of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi from a perspective which is different from the conventional mode of understanding the history. The work tries to view the historical queen from the perspective of Feminism and Nationalism. The monograph begins with an analysis of the biographical reading of the Rani, which is significant in understanding the Rani and her Jhansi, and also in conceiving the monograph in its entirety. The biographical trail that has explicated the history and the transformation of the Rani, links the work to folksongs sung and appreciated during the period of the Mutiny of 1857 and a few historical personages. This is to understand the formation of 'images' on the Rani, arriving at a point that two sets of Images have been formed on her—the Indian and the British, each having its own utilitarian ideologies. The 'images' thus formed have a greater role in the history of the freedom movement of India, as it led to the formation of 'icons', a graded version of the 'images'. The 'icons' thus formed served to inspire several revolutionaries of the period to shake the pillars of the colonial powers that had ruled the Indian minds and land, which signifies its importance.

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*Published by*  
Institute of English, University of Kerala  
Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram  
Kerala, India 695034

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*First Impression 2017*

ISBN 978-93-5279-725-7

Design: *Godfrey's Graphics*



Through the prism of life...

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The first war of Indian Independence or the Mutiny of 1857, as it is often referred to, was a stepping stone towards the cultural, political, historical and even geographical re-mapping of India. The extent of the definitive changes that came over the mindset of common men, after the first war of Independence or the 1857 Mutiny, resulted in the shaping of new ideas about the nation, affirmatively unique in culture and ideology. While living in the twenty-first century, a rearward reading of the history to understand, appreciate and remember the personalities who worked in this political upheaval, brings to mind several names that instigated the minds of the common Indian to fight against the colonial super powers, through their words and actions. Rani Lakshmi Bai, Mangal Pandey, Begum Hazrath Mahal, Nana Sahib and Kunwar Singh are a few names in the long list that have endeavored to enflame the glowing embers of independence, self-reliance and righteousness in the minds of the naïve Indian to bring out a positive and revolutionary change. To acknowledge and glorify the impressive changes brought about by the Mutiny and the brave hearts who contributed in it, through arts, artifacts or literature is a necessity even in this century. Such practices help to refresh the memories of the Mutiny and revere the martyrs who triggered the fervor and zeal of the common man against the colonial super powers.

The First War of Independence, termed as the Mutiny of 1857, although a failure in that it could not reach its ultimate goal, succeeded in carving a positive imprint in the minds of the common men. The vision and mission of the leaders, the strategies adopted and organized and the measures planned and carried out were inspiring enough to be remembered even now. The leaders of the 1857 Mutiny are still viewed with awe and reverence, since they illustrated the way to the future success of nationalists with their lives and experiences. Hence it is not uncommon that even in the twenty-first century the leaders of the nineteenth century continue to earn respect and recognition. The best illustration for this is the historic warrior queen of the Revolt of 1857—Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. The image and persona of the Rani is still viewed with reverence in the present era; the literary, cultural and artistic forms of projecting and propagating the image of the Rani are underway even in the present times. The contemporary relevance of the image of the Rani puts forth the essential fact that the tendency of carving a political, cultural, religious and even a national icon of the Rani that started in the nineteenth century is sure to continue in the future too. The fact that the name of the Rani still gets attached to the province for which she fought and became a martyr explains it all. The appellations Rani Lakshmi Bai and Jhansi are well crystallized with each other for the past one hundred and sixty years in such a way that one name stands as an indicator for the other and they do not seem to have an existence without a reference to each other. Rani Lakshmi Bai lived for the people of Jhansi, fought to uphold the name of Jhansi and attained martyrdom. She is well remembered as Jhansi ki Rani in the minds of the people, and even Jhansi does not have a history without the Rani.

### **The Trail of History/Herstory: From Manikarnika to Jhansi ki Rani**

A reading of the history of Rani Lakshmi Bai and Jhansi framed within the boundaries of the first War of Independence that took place in 1857 helps in understanding the role played by the Rani in the Mutiny, her fight against the Doctrine of Lapse,

and also her attainment of martyrdom. Thus a framed history helps in constructing numerous images of the Rani. A reading of the life of the Rani without the boundaries that prevent the freedom of reconstruction opens up the possibilities of transforming the images of history to icons. Thus a deconstructed reading of history, without any constraints of historical formulations helps in the configuration of cultural, social, religious and political icons. In the case of Rani Lakshmi Bai, these icons that are formulated from the different spheres of life she occupied serve for the betterment and development of the subjects and the nation as a whole. However the prime point to be stressed is that any open-ended reading of the life of a historical character or history should have a strong base in events and practices as they are narrated and circulated. Only from this fundamental knowledge, a deconstruction, and a further reconstruction is possible. Hence it is a necessity to understand the history of the Rani and her Jhansi, to analyze the images, and to further reconstruct the icons.

Jhansi has a long and protracted history to boast off starting from the sixteenth century, while it remained a mere principality of Bundelkhand ruled by Maharaj Chhatrasal Bundela. Though Jhansi boasts of this long history, it is hailed as the Jhansi of Rani Lakshmi Bai, the nineteenth-century queen, who had sacrificed her life for Jhansi; and the Rani as Jhansi ki Rani. The history of Jhansi ki Rani starts with the transformation of Manikarnika/Manu to Lakshmi Bai in 1842, when she married Raja Gangadhar Rao Nealkar, the King of Jhansi.

Manikarnika was born to middle-class Maratha Brahmin parents, Moropant Tambe and Bagirathi Bai Tambe in Varanasi. It was while Tambe was serving Chimnaji Appa in the court of Varanasi that Manikarnika was born to him and his wife; they called her Manu for short. Manikarnika lost her mother when she was four years old. Chimnaji Appa too passed away the same year. After the death of Chimnaji Appa, Moropant Tambe left Varanasi along with his four-year-old daughter to join the last Peshwa, Baji Rao II, the elder brother of Chimnaji Appa in Bithoor near Kanpur. Peshwa Baji Rao II was exiled to Bithoor by the British after the third Anglo-Maratha war and upon his invitation to help him in the state of affairs, the wise and learned

Moropant Tambe joined him as his courtier and advisor. Thus Manu spent her childhood days in Bithoor, along with Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the Peshwa Rao Sahib, Nana's nephew and Tantia Tope, a friend of Nana Sahib.

Historians and biographers of Rani Lakshmi Bai differ in their opinions regarding Manikarnika's year of birth. The recorded history varies in its version of the age and year of birth of Manikarnika. Still, the majority of the biographers and historians say that she was born in or around 1827, based on the reports of eyewitnesses like John Lang and Macpherson who have seen the Rani in person. Hence the author of this monograph too wishes to follow this estimation.

Baji Rao II had made provisions for the education of little Manu (Manikarnika), though it was very unusual in those days to ponder over the issue of a girl being given education. In addition to this, Manu also exhibited keen interest in learning and practicing martial arts and horse riding – other uncommon interests for girls of those times to pursue. Manu's childhood companionship with older boys and her fostering and nurturing under her father's guidance have given manly attributes or even a tomboyish touch to her character. This persona of the Rani may have given her all the strength during the precarious phase of 1857 (Smyth 17).

Manikarnika was married to Gangadhar Rao, the King of Jhansi, who was much older to her and also a widower. While the biographers of the Rani may disagree in their views regarding the year of birth of the Rani, they unanimously point out that she got married in 1842. Sinha in his *Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi*, aptly comments about their wedding thus: "Jhansi saw another notable event in the year 1842 when Lakshmi Bai, who was destined to play an important role in the history of this state was married to Raja Gangadhar Rao" (10). As per the customs and traditions of the Nevalkar family, the bride had to be given a new name by her husband's family, and thus Manikarnika was renamed Lakshmi Bai, the name of Goddess Mahalakshmi, the family deity of the Nevalkars. Thus Manikarnika was blessed with an immaculate and perpetual appellation, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi.

Rani Lakshmi Bai gave birth to a son in 1851, nine years after her marriage, and named him Damodar Rao. The delight did not last long, as the child died in its fourth month. This incident shook the Raja to his core and drove him to illness and infirmities in his thirty-eighth year. It was during this time of mourning that the couple came to know that the British authorities succumbed to a wild craze for annexation, grounded on the theory termed Doctrine of Lapse, after the arrival of Lord Dalhousie, the new Governor-General of India, in 1848.

The Doctrine of Lapse can be described as a circuitous dogmatic rule implemented by Lord Dalhousie to expand the space and strength of the British-Indian protectorate, thereby creating space for a British market to sell their finished products. The Doctrine of Lapse and the annexation policy that followed it were the aptly chosen devices that aided them to implement a uniform Western law by wiping out completely the Eastern beliefs and thoughts (Malleon, *Kaye's and Malleon's*: 260). The policy of Lapse and Annexation did not approve of any claimant to the throne other than the legitimately and biologically begotten male heir. The policy was so harsh that it did not allow even an adopted son, who has the right to perform the last rites of his father, to take possession of at least his title in perpetuity.

Raja Gangadhar Rao's health deteriorated steadily after the loss of his son in 1851 and the chances of begetting another natural heir to the throne of Jhansi were limited. Under such a situation, Raja Gangadhar Rao and Rani Lakshmi Bai together decided to adopt a male child from the Raja's family to ascend the throne of Jhansi. Thus on 20 November 1853, in a grand adoption ceremony attended by Major Ellis, the then Political Agent of Jhansi and Major Malcolm, the Political Agent commanding Bundelkhand, Rewah and Gwalior contingents as witnesses to avoid any kind of complication or confusion regarding the issue of adoption in future, Anand Rao, the five-year-old son of a distant relative of the Raja was adopted as the son of the royal couple. In the adoption ceremony the child was re-named Damodar Gangadhar Rao Nevalkar and thus acknowledged as the heir to continue the legacy of the Nevalkar family and the administration

of Jhansi. On 21 November 1853, Raja Gangadhar Rao passed away. Soon after the death of the Raja, the British instigated problems in Jhansi regarding the adoption, stating that it was not valid according to the Doctrine of Lapse and the Annexation Policy.

Shortly after the period of mourning, the Rani appeared on the political platform to face the challenge. Several *khareetas* were sent by the Rani to the British Government, explicating her points and arguments regarding the adoption performed on 20 November 1853 and also her arguments against the lapse of the Jhansi Raj. Not a single *khareeta* succeeded in eliciting a reply from the British Government, and they annexed Jhansi to the British dominion on 27 February 1854. The annexation of Jhansi has been commented on by various historians differently. T. Rice Holmes comments: “It is certain that if Jhansi and Ayodhya were not taken over by the British, most of the problems that the British government had to face in 1857-58, could have been avoided” (qtd. in Devi 55). Sinha observes that the annexation of Jhansi cannot be justified either legally or morally. He condemns the British policy by observing that the endeavour of annexation of Jhansi is “. . . not only impolitic but unjust and without any excuse” (26). It is also recorded in the documents how the Rani responded to this situation wherein the Rani made a historic declaration, “Meri Jhansi doonginahin” which means “I will not give up my Jhansi” (Devi 57). This shows her undying confidence and will power to fight against the forces that had unlawfully encroached upon her land and the minds of her subjects.

After the annexation, the palace inside the fortress, which was a symbol of power and supremacy, came under British control and the Rani had to live in Rani Mahal, a five-storied building that her late husband had built for her in the city. She was granted a meager amount of five thousand Company’s rupees as pension every month from the treasury at Jhansi for her living, and to support her cortege. On the other hand, the wealth of the late Raja and the Jhansi treasury was kept under the control of the British government, under the pretext that it would be conferred to the adopted son of the late Raja and the Rani when he comes of age. The annexation of Jhansi and the subsequent conditions



set forth by the British was an offense to the Rani, showering bitter insults on her. After the annexation, the Rani sent several letters to the British government to reconsider their annexation plans, and even sought legal help to deal with it, but all her efforts were in vain. The annexation affected not only the Rani, but also the land and minds of Jhansi socially, politically and religiously. However, even at this stage the Rani maintained her stand that Jhansi was a powerless native state and her late husband was a peace-lover who never wished to bring in unsolicited intrusions into state affairs, and hence she would not use power to resist the annexation. The continual pressure of the British government upon the Rani, by taking strict, illogical and adamant steps added to the existing trouble. Their demand that the Rani should settle a debt of thirty-six thousand rupees that an erstwhile Raja of Jhansi, Ramchandra Rao owed to the Company was an additional encumbrance that the British forced upon her. The Rani resisted this order by reasoning that since the treasury of Jhansi and the personal wealth of the late Raja were kept under the trust of the Company, this debt should be placed under the responsibility of the Government. The merits of this issue were ignored and the British started deducting money from her monthly stipend. T. Rice Holmes comments thus on this issue: "If the Government had not called upon her to pay this debt out of her pension, a meagre six thousand pounds . . . Central India would have never had an uprising" (qtd. in Devi 69).

Gradually an annoyance started to crop up amongst the sepoys in the adjoining provinces of Jhansi. In view of this unrest, Rani Lakshmi Bai sought permission of Captain Skene to raise an army for her protection, and for her safety from the rebels. Captain Skene, who had full trust in the Rani based on the cordial relations maintained by the former Rajas and the Company, granted her the permission to avoid any threat from the rebels against her, and accordingly a small army was raised under her supervision as her personal protection force. Contrary to the confidence of the British authorities in Jhansi, on 5 June 1857, the sepoys of the Jhansi garrison mutinied. This uprising that started on 5 June led to the Jokhan Bagh Massacre on 8 June 1857 which in turn distorted the reputation of the Rani of Jhansi.

On 6 June 1857, the rebels set fire to the official residence of the British officers and yelled: “*Deenka jai*”, meaning “Victory to the Faith” (Forrest, *History of the Indian Mutiny* 3:7). They then marched towards the palace of Rani Lakshmi Bai and threatened to set fire to her residence, if she continued to give succour to the British. She was also forced to comply to the demands of the rebels to provide them with money and weapons. Inspired by them, the Rani’s personal guards too joined the rebels and together they marched to storm the fort, inside which the Rani had accommodated the families of the British officers. The news that the Rani had given assistance to the rebels by giving them money and arms reached the British and the Rani clarified her stand under which she was forced to supply them with what they had demanded. She even notified the British that it would no longer be safe for them to occupy the fort under such a situation and hence recommended them to evacuate it as early as possible. On 8 June 1857, the mutineers agreed to give a safe passage for the British people outside the Jhansi fort on one proviso, that they should surrender their weapons and come out unarmed. On the same day, trusting the words of the mutineers, sixty-six British people including women and children came out unarmed. They were led forth by the rebels towards the Star Fort and when they reached a place named Jokhan Bagh, the leaders ordered a brutal murder and the sixty-six unarmed British people were brutally killed. This notorious incident, termed the Jokhan Bagh Massacre, redefined the fate and history of Jhansi and smeared the reputation of its Rani in the eyes of the British.

Jokhan Bagh Massacre, the brutal historic incident which took place on 8 June 1857, resulted in a transmutation of the reputation of Rani Lakshmi Bai before the British authorities. She was degraded to the position of a mere political turncoat in the eyes of the British, except for a few. This had its negative repercussions on the state of affairs of Jhansi. She was termed the Jezebel of India by the British. While the British looked down upon Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Indian historians tried to focus on her ingenuousness in connection with the macabre massacre that took place in Jokhan Bagh. Forrest in his *The Indian Mutiny: 1857-58: Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State*

*Papers Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India—Jhansi, Calpee, Gwalior* observed about the Rani thus: “We cannot forget she was answerable for a massacre of men, women and children . . .” (162-63). In the third volume of his *A History of the Indian Mutiny* too he expresses his antipathy towards the Rani: “She dexterously employed religious mendicants, the dark engines of fanaticism always to be found in India, to fan among the people the embers of religious hate caused by the open slaughter of kine, for the purpose of food amid a Hindu population” (Forrest 4). *The Oxford History of India* published in 1958 has chronicled that “the refusal to recognise the Raja’s last minute adoption infuriated his high-spirited Rani, who took her revenge in the Mutiny by killing every European within reach” (qtd. in Jerosch 58). Malleison in *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* dubs her as a “high-spirited and ambitious lady” (258). According to his viewpoint, the Rani “. . . in June 1857, gained to her cause the sipáhis stationed at Jhansi, enticed the English officers and their families to accept her protection, and had them foully murdered” (259). In a different work of his, it has been noted thus about the Rani, “She wished to be rid of the English . . . and hesitated not at the means by which they were moved from her path” (Malleison, *Kaye’s and Malleison’s* 3: 68).

The opinions of the Indian historians vary entirely from that of the British historians. Sinha points out: “Had the mutinous sepoys been under her control, they would not have threatened her with the loss of her life and property and extorted money from her. She could also have detained them at Jhansi for she needed men to protect her territory” (56). The Rani’s innocence is also proved in a letter send by Major R. R. W. Ellis, Political Assistant for Bundelkhand and Rewa, to the Secretary to the Government, Nagode dated 26 June 1857. Here he clearly asserts the point that the Rani had no business with the mutineers in connection with the Jokhan Bagh Massacre. In this letter he has documented, “The mutineers at last having forced the Ranee to assist them with guns and elephants succeeded in effecting an entrance at two of the gates” (Rizvi and Bhargava 7).

Delhi had become the centre of the Mutiny where the mutineers from different places gathered. The Jhansi mutineers,

before marching to Delhi, met the Rani with a demand for money as they were short of funds. They demanded three lakh rupees and threatened to seize the authority of Jhansi from her, if she did not comply. The Rani was forced to give them her jewellery worth one lakh rupees to escape the situation (qtd. in Sinha 53). The mutineers proclaimed: “The People are God’s; the country is the King’s (Padshah’s) and the Raj is Rani Lakshmi Bai’s” (Malleon, *Kaye’s and Malleon’s* 3: 361). They departed Jhansi on 11 June 1857.

The Rani wrote two letters to Major W. E. Erskine, Commissioner, Sagar Division on 12 June and 14 June 1857, explicating and condemning the violence and mutiny that took place in Jhansi. She admitted the fact that she was forced to supply what they had demanded from her to protect Jhansi and the common people from them, but that her fidelity always rests with the British. She even pointed out that it was with great difficulty that she saved Jhansi from falling into a state of anarchy after this unexpected series of events (Rizvi and Bhargava 65-68). Major Erskine acknowledged both the letters, and assured her law and order could be restored in Jhansi without delay, and they would deal liberally with her. Along with his dispatch he attached a proclamation with his signature and seal that permitted Rani Lakshmi Bai to govern Jhansi and collect revenues on behalf of the British Government till a new superintendent took charge (Rizvi and Bhargava 69). Soon after Major Erskine gave such orders to the Rani, he was informed that Lord Canning, the then Governor-General was not pleased with the steps taken by Erskine regarding Jhansi and the Rani, for he had his doubts regarding the fidelity of the Rani (Sinha 60-61).

Rani Lakshmi Bai proved herself to be a meticulous and sharp diplomat during her short period of regency. The reign that she demonstrated within the short span of time won for her the trust and affection of the common people of Jhansi, which aided her during the times of emergency. The steps that she had adopted to bring about peace and welfare within her domain brought her close to the people. Though she proved to a capable ruler during the period of regency, she had to face several threats from all sides demanding the throne of Jhansi. Threats were posed from Orcha

and Datia—the neighbouring states of Jhansi, and also from Sadashiv Narain Rao, a claimant to the throne of Jhansi after the death of Raja Gangadhar Rao. Though the Rani informed the British authorities about the threats she had been facing since she ascended the throne of Jhansi, she did not receive any reply or guidance from them, as they were busily engaged in recapturing Delhi, and extinguishing the fire of the Mutiny. Hence the Rani had to use military tactics to ward off the threats to her kingdom. Soon after meeting the crises that were intimidating her, Rani Lakshmi Bai again wrote to Major Erskine who had actually appointed her to govern Jhansi, informing him of the situation in Jhansi and her endeavours to prevent Jhansi from falling into a state of anarchy. Erskine neither acknowledged her letters nor did he make his proclamation known to the public. This was because several of Erskine's higher officers had started doubting the veracity of the Rani in connection with the Jokhan Bagh Massacre. Under such a circumstance, he avoided any cordial communication with the Rani who had by then been blacklisted by the British higher authorities.

Rani Lakshmi Bai found the situation to be exasperating, when her pleas to the British passed off unheeded during times of emergency. When she was deprived of support from the British while Jhansi was attacked by Datia and Orchha, the Rani for the first time, appeared on the battlefield in her military outfit to face her enemies. She made several preparations to face this battle that was waged against her neighbouring adversaries—she befriended several Rajas like the Raja of Banpur and the Raja of Sagar who had strong anti-British feelings within them, recruited an army and gave them special training. These preparations for war, which she had made to meet her adversaries of the neighbouring states, actually served well for her in the later stages, when she had to face the British themselves on the battlefield. Rani Lakshmi Bai continued to send dispatches to the British authorities reporting her helpless situation and entreating their assistance. None of her dispatches were acknowledged by the British. This underlined the fact that the British did not wish to have any cordial ties with the Rani and would encounter her on the battlefield with all military means.

The British intelligence reports of January and February 1858 validate that she had no intentions to oppose the British and was in fact even ready to handover the state of Jhansi to the British. This attitude of the Rani had earned for her the discontent of her subjects, who nurtured an anti-British feeling within them. Certain deeds and dealings of the Rani instigated doubts in the minds of the British regarding her commitment towards them—the Rani’s act of employing Bakshish Ali, the leader of the mutineers and the instigator of the Jokhan Bagh Massacre in her service, manufacturing a few more guns, polishing her old guns and even making arrangements for the manufacturing and stowing of gunpowder (qtd. in Rizvi and Bhargava 221). The British reports suggested that the Rani was playing a double game before the British, to make preparations to attack British and claim Jhansi for herself. Contrary to the conjectures and conclusions of the British, Tapti Roy in *Raj of the Rani* clarifies the facts regarding the military measures organized by the Rani thus: “These measures had little to do with her affirmation that she did not wish to fight the British. These were defensive steps to save Jhansi” (132). Later the Rani realized the fact that the British would never acknowledge her innocence and they were planning to confront her with military power. Tapti Roy observes thus in her *Raj of the Rani*: “Even if she had not been responsible for the massacre, she did nothing to prevent it, making her culpable in the eyes of the Government. This was precisely the line of thinking of the council in Calcutta that dispatched counter-insurgency forces against her, dismissing all her pleas” (108-09).

The rebel forces in Jhansi succeeded in instilling the ideas of religion and faith in the minds of the people and urged them to fight the British. A letter had been circulated by the Deputy Commissioner of Jalaun dated 19 September 1857 that endorse retributions mainly to the Rani of Jhansi and Bakshish Ali, the chief instigator of the Jokhan Bagh Massacre. The British regarded the Rani of Jhansi as the greatest of their rebels. By this time, the rebellious forces had instigated skirmishes in the Central part of India. Joined by the masses, the strengthened forces started their warfare by conquering the towns and forts of Central India. To suppress the skirmishes at any cost became a necessity for the

British authorities. Hugh Henry Rose was thus appointed as the leader of the Central India Expedition, which changed the fate and future of Jhansi and Rani Lakshmi Bai.

Sir Hugh received instructions to crush Jhansi with little delay, as the British attached greater significance to the fall of Jhansi because they considered the fort of Jhansi the “stronghold of revolutionary power in Bundelkhand” (Sinha 67). Rani Lakshmi Bai too comprehended the fact that the British forces would soon confront her with force and power and that she should make preparations to defend Jhansi. A historic decision was thus made by the Rani to face the British on the battlefield. She expected the British authorities to understand her innocence in connection with the macabre massacre, and maintain cordial relations with her, as they had been earlier. She was ready to submit the territory to them without any force or pressure. What happened was contrary to what she had desired, and thus she was forced to turn into a rebel in the eyes of the British. Actually speaking, Rani Lakshmi Bai turned into a rebel against her own wish. It was the circumstances concocted by the British themselves that coerced her to turn into a rebel and act against them.

The British forces, under the leadership of Hugh Rose entered Jhansi on 2 April 1858. On 5 April 1858, the British army surrounded the Jhansi fortress, the icon of the Jhansi ruling power. Early that morning, before the British forces made their move towards the fort, the Rani, who had anticipated this situation, escaped from Jhansi on horseback with her son tied to her back, along with a band of people and a few courtiers. The Rani made her move towards Kalpi and her plan was to combine the troops of her allies and encounter the British forces from there. Then the Rani and her army led a series of battles against the British from various places like Kalpi, Kunch, Gwalior and Kotah-Ki-Sarai. The rebel army led by the Rani emerged victorious in all the battles, except that of Kotah-Ki-Serai’s—the battle which marked the death of the Rani. The Rani’s audacity has been commented on thus: “The Mahratta Queen was as much at ease galloping on a horse as in the Zenana listening to her favourite minstrel” (Forrest, *Selections from the Letters* 126).

The Rani attained martyrdom on 18 June 1858, while fighting against the British in Kotah-Ki-Serai. This event was reported by Robert Hamilton from Gwalior to Lord Canning in Calcutta; Colin Campbell, Elphinstone and Captain Hutchinson in Indore and to E.A. Reade in Agra through a telegraphic message: "The Ranee of Jhansie is killed. Maharajah Scindia has arrived. Brigadier Smith took four guns in the fight yesterday" (Sinha *Mutiny Telegrams* 156).

The posthumous comments made about the Rani by both Indian and British historians serve to understand the real virtue of Rani Lakshmi Bai. Surendranath Sen, who has great respect and admiration for this Indian heroine of the war, documents his positive comments on the Rani in his *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*. "If the reverence of her own people is any compensation for vilification by her enemies, Rani of Jhansi stands more than vindicated. Thousands of unsophisticated villagers still sing of the valour and virtues of the woman who held her own against her Bundela enemies to fall under a British bullet" (296).

Malleson has recorded his comment on the Rani from the Indian perspective. According to him, "Whatever her faults in the British eyes may have been, her country men will ever believe that she was driven by ill-treatment into rebellion; that her cause was a righteous cause; and that the treatment she received at the hands of Lord Dalhousie was one of the main causes of the disaffection in Bundelkhand and Central India in 1857-58. To them she will always be a heroine" (Malleson *Kaye's and Malleson's* 6: 155).

Contrary to the reflections of an Indian historian, the observation of a British historian affirms the bitter fact that they would never accept Rani Lakshmi Bai as the heroine of the war. According to British sources, the Rani is always a heroine in the eyes of an Indian, but for the British she is always a wrong-doer, who traversed against the accepted policies, and an established form of government. The image of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi is carved in the minds of the Indians as a female leader who strived hard to liberate them from the shackles of Western hegemony. She is ever remembered as our national heroine and



that icon is well illustrated in the monuments and statues built to commemorate her, during the post-independence period. The inscriptions carved on her tomb constructed in Phool Bagh, in the city of Gwalior shows how India idolizes this national heroine. The English translation of the Sanskrit inscription reads thus:

The nurturer of the city of Jhansi, who dressed like a man, who could ride the tallest of horses, who held a raised sword in her hand, who was thrilled by the frenzy of war like the Goddess Kali, who many times challenged English Generals such as Hugh Rose in battle, that Lakshmi (the Goddess of fortune), was killed here as if by an unfortunate turn of destiny and went [back] to heaven. (qtd. in Devi 246)

## **Reading the Registered and the Unregistered: Unraveling the Images and Imaginations on the Rani**

Symbols are born out of stories, legends and ballads created by the primitive minds that have not seen the light of modern standards of education. It is from the ballads, legends and myths transferred vocally by the primal folk singers that the symbols take its basic form. These stories are born most probably in the primordial and folk background, which is vernacular in nature. Since they are not encrypted and preserved in concrete words, the symbols formed from these too lack a fixed form and shape. With the passage of time, these symbols configure in its own ways, suiting the temperament of the locations and circumstances. Mircea Eliade proposes a realistic reason for the formation of symbols and icons in Indian culture, rather than in a Western or modern culture. She explains that Indian culture perceives time as cyclical, rather than the Western culture which perceives it as linear. The cyclical time helps in the formation of myths rather than history (qtd. in Chapman 118). From the myths, symbols are generated and are later transformed into images and icons.

This part of the Monograph analyses the evolution of Rani Lakshmi Bai as a heroine in the minds of the people during the

period of the first war of Independence of 1857 and later how the identity of the Rani was transmuted in the pre-independence period to influential images powerful enough to boost the minds of the people to fight foreign powers. The period that constitutes the frame work of this section to establish the evolution of this historic heroine from the reputation of the Queen of Jhansi to the echelons of the influential images, such as Warrior Queen, War Goddess, Mother and Protector of Jhansi, is from the Mutiny of 1857 to the late nineteenth century. This short period of history or her story is examined in this section.

During the late 1850s, while the Mutiny was waging its vigour especially in the Central Provinces of India, the names of Rani Lakshmi Bai, Nana Sahib and Tantya Tope has evolved as symbols or rather images to boost the confidence of the people fighting against the foreign powers. Among these leaders of Central India, the role and temperament of the Rani has been represented and they reverberate in the form of stories, songs and symbols / images during the period of the Mutiny. The Rani persisted in the war field only for a short period, but the war strategies she had implemented, the early age in which she attained martyrdom and the simple way of life she had embraced were the facts of attraction in the making of history. This elevated her persona to pinnacles by the Indians who had lived, witnessed and fought during these days. While the Indians heightened the glory of the Rani and codified her name and nature in the form of positive signifiers in the pre-independence era for their own purposes, the British too had codified symbols/signifiers and images of the Rani to serve their ends. They had codified two sets of images of the Rani – negative and affirmative, both on a utilitarian basis. These images and symbols codified by the British were woven into stories, and printed and published under the appellation Mutiny Narratives/ Mutiny Fiction. The Indian images and ideas were collated in the form of legends, songs and ballads and disseminated orally. They had managed to document the resources, but fearing the British, the Indians never tried to publish it.

A convenient classification of the images formed of Rani Lakshmi Bai during the pre-independence period could be

classified into two – the one crafted by the British and the other by the colonized Indians. The images formulated by the British were the image of Indian Jezebel, Indian Boadicea and Indian Joan of Arc. Each of these images echoed a male chauvinistic attitude towards a colonial woman. The other set of images were the creations of the Indian minds, which paid tribute to the Rani for her struggle against colonial domination. These included Warrior Queen, Goddess Image and Guardian/Mother Image. These are the basic images formed of Rani Lakshmi Bai and these images have undergone transformation with the passage of time and politics. These images were generated with an aim to instill patriotism in the minds of the common men and urge them to fight against the colonial powers. They have acquired the shades of iconization captured by the fervour of nationalism in a later period. This section probes into the details of the images coerced upon the personality of Rani Lakshmi Bai during the second half of the nineteenth century or more precisely the period that precedes nationalism and its fervour.

The negative image of Indian Jezebel that the British had forced upon the personality of the Rani is outlandish and unforgivable for any Indian with a modicum of patriotism. The British had given an immense circulation to this negative image during the pre-independence times through Mutiny novels and narratives. Some of the British newspapers too have described her as the Jezebel of India. The British historians who lived during the period of Mutiny, and the administrators who were in the field during those precarious days are solely responsible for the dissemination of such an image through the medium of literature. Since they had more easy access to the medium of publication than the Indians, the image had its easy dispersal as they intended. According to Biblical accounts, Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab of Northern Israel, who lived during the ninth century BC, identified in the Hebrew *Book of Kings*. The Biblical record opens up several unethical delinquencies committed by her. This includes inciting King Ahab to abandon the worship of Yahweh, tyrannizing the prophets of Yahweh and dispersing profanity against people and thereby putting them to unnatural death. This devilish character of Queen Jezebel encrypted in the

Bible naturally associated her name with women of low morals. The literal meaning of the word Jezebel is impudent, shameless and morally unrestrained woman (*Jezebel* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jezebel>).

The British, during pre-independence times, had their own logic and motive for associating the Rani with the image of Jezebel, and thereby creating a negative image of her. This association of the images was perpetrated in literature produced by the British, and they themselves took the initiative in propagating this image soon after the Jokhan Bagh Massacre of 8 June 1857. The Rani was trapped by the British in the web of misconceptions and this led to the belittling the image of the Rani by them. Comparing and associating her with a character like Jezebel, whose name is associated with images such as promiscuity, wily machinations and paganism shows the intensity of colonial odium towards her. This image of the Indian Jezebel has been propagated through literature – Mutiny novels/ Mutiny narratives and historiography of the Mutiny documented by the British historians during the period of Mutiny, which are the main modes of dissemination.

The negative images of the Rani were disseminated through Mutiny novels that crafted the settings and characters related to the Mutiny from the author's experience, imagination or knowledge, from hearsay and references. The Mutiny Novel is a genre of fiction in which the story unfurls within the framework of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the British military officers, administrators, Indian leaders, sepoys and common people who support the colonial regime and the mutineers form a plethora of characterization. The British Mutiny novels were created with the aim of showcasing British gallantry and solidarity, and thereby tarnishing the persona of the Indian leaders who rebelled against them in the field. It has been observed:

The theme of imperialism, proud and arrogant, stemming from the utilitarian associations of many of these writers derived additional strength from the overwhelming success of British arms during the Indian revolt of 1857, a circumstance which accounted for “the flowering of

imperialist literature in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.” (Chaudhuri 15)

The Mutiny novels are basically historical novels and can be grouped under two categories for convenience. The first category is the Early Mutiny Novel and the second is the Post-Imperial Mutiny Novel. The Early Mutiny Novels were those written by British administrators and military officers in the war field, who had first-hand experience of the Mutiny. Out of their revenge and ego towards the Indians in conspiring and remonstrating against the colonial system in the form of the Mutiny, the British took the Early Mutiny Fiction as a medium to tarnish the personality of the Indian leaders, to demotivate the Indians and even to make them docile. The Post-Imperial Mutiny Novels – published after India attained independence – too delineate the Mutiny of 1857 as its backdrop with British officers and Indian subjects as the main set of characters. Though the framework of these novels remains the same as that of the Early Mutiny Novels, they vary in their composition. Singh, in his *Novels on the Indian Mutiny*, has explained in detail about the nature of the Mutiny novels after India achieved the status of self-governance. He has observed thus about the Post-Imperial Mutiny Novels:

There is no public demand or necessity for any particular show of British superiority . . . . Now the author is able to give a significant picture of Indian aspirations . . . .their conspiracy to revolt, showing the British blindness to the signs, as well as their general scorn, apathy and unconcern for the welfare of the sepoys. The Mutiny is no longer treated simply militarily, where the sepoy kills his colonel and brings vengeance upon himself. Political, national, religious and administrative questions are raised to give a total view of the times. A human conflict is set at the centre of the novel, but is surrounded by other issues also. (Singh 195)

This monograph attempts to elucidate how the imperial sources have portrayed a contemptuous and cynical picture of the Rani, and proposed negative images of her, with the aid of two novels—*The Rane: A Legend of the Indian Mutiny, 1857-*

1858 published in 1887 by Gillean, an Early Mutiny Novel; and *Flashman in the Great Game: From the Flashman Papers 1856–1858* by George MacDonald Fraser (1975), a Post-Imperial Mutiny Novel.

Gillean's *The Rane: A Legend of the Indian Mutiny, 1857–1858* focuses on Rani Luchme Bhie of Ranepore as the central character. The queen of Ranepore in this fiction is none other than the Rani of Jhansi – Rani Lakshmi Bai. The author here portrays her as a woman, who “bore a character better known for evil than for good” (15). Befitting the characteristics of an Early Mutiny Fiction, this novel focuses on defiling and deglamorizing the character and personality of the Indian leaders, here Luchme Bhie—the Rane in order to draw the attention of his readers to the colonial superiority and thereby providing an entertainment to the colonial psyche. This idea co-relates with what Indrani Sen has remarked about Mutiny Novels. According to Sen, such novels are “constructions or ideologically loaded projections of reality instead of reflections of reality. As ideologically loaded portrayals . . . these narratives perhaps reveal more about colonial perceptions than they do about their subject and in the process throw light on shifting colonial attitudes and ideologies” (*Woman and Empire* 253).

Gillean delineates his Luchme Bhie as a woman of loose morals, who seduces Shakespeare, the political agent of Ranepore to redraft the will of her husband in favour of her. Rajah Gungadhur Row (Raja Gangadhar Rao) pictured as the ruler of Ranepore, who had affinity towards his British masters, does not want his rapacious spouse to claim his throne and estate after his death. He dreads that she would ruin his kingdom, and his adopted son Burjore, who is a minor, would be deprived of his rightful wealth and property when he comes of age. Moreover he confides to the political agent of Ranepore that he has “. . . reason to suspect her fidelity” (18). Hence he requests the British authorities to annex his kingdom to the British dominion so that it could be safely handed over to Burjore when he comes of age. This description of Rane Luchme Bhie in Gillean's *The Rane* fits well within the template of the Biblical image of an impudent, scheming and sexually promiscuous Jezebel. A reading of such

a version of a misrepresented persona of the Rani in the Early Mutiny Novels leads the reader to relate it to the observation of Sangari and Vaid that “The compulsion of colonial rule to extract surplus, create classes conducive to its rule” (5).

Gillean’s verbal portrayal of a man-eating tigress is worth noticeable in *The Rane*. The image of this ferocious tigress that propitiates only by devouring the flesh and blood of human beings offers an ineffable comparison to Luchme Bhie in the novel, mainly because the author has chosen to describe the image of a “tigress” rather than a tiger, that is “cunning as a *shītām*” (30). The reader comes across this image of the man-eating tigress, cunning as a devil, after being introduced to the character of Luchme Bhie through the words of her husband, Rajah Gungadhur Rao himself, as “bad, ill-dispossessed woman” and “unscrupulous woman”, which offers a mute comparison of the tigress with the Rane (20). Language has thus been utilized as a powerful tool to generate a discourse, which has aided the reader to co-relate the characteristics of a personality to an animal imagery.

Language is a medium of power and authority, which encompasses the potential to deracinate any power structure. The British masters who had realized the iconoclastic and dominating power of language has well utilized it in novels and narratives to subsume the psyche of the Indians, and thereby their frames and realms as a whole. Language used as a tool of hegemony to overpower the colonized, is also deployed as an implement to instil courage and sow seeds of retaliation in the minds of the British officers and militants soon after the Mutiny of 1857. This power which was accessible only to the British has been employed in the Early Mutiny narratives and novels primarily with an empirical and utilitarian ideology of iconoclasm – to break down the accepted values, tradition and beliefs of the Indians and thereby to dishearten them, which would naturally reflect in their perceptual and physical performances. *The Rane* by Gillean is a novel of this genre, which has utilized the iconoclastic power of language.

Early Mutiny Novels that buoy up fictional fabrications and distort historic events and characters of the colonists are

generated to instill British culture, nationalism and identity in India. These novels try to convey the idea that, in order to refine the feral Indian ways of life, the British should continue to be their masters. In this context it is appropriate to point out that, “In teaching this sense of British identity, other national cultures and identities within Britain were left out of the canon” (Longhurst et al 12). These novels were crafted to warm up the British psyche, and instill strength and courage in them after facing a bloody Mutiny. The novels are also a reminder that though the Mutiny was planned and well operated by the Indians, the power and will of the British has triumphed. Thus the Early Mutiny Novels have aided to strengthen the power structures in various forms.

It is essential to note how in the colonial narratives the Rani has been stripped of all decency and portrayed as a woman engaged in luxurious living, careless of the customary rules prescribed for women in the higher castes in traditional Indian society. As the widow of a king, Lakshmi Bai was expected to follow certain rules and regulations of the society. In the literature of the Mutiny period produced by the British sources, remarks have been made on the Rani, who goes against the prescribed rules of an Indian orthodox family. In *The Rane*, Gillean has delineated a scene in which Luchme Bhie enjoys smoking a hookah. This act of the Rani that the Mutiny novelist has portrayed in his novel goes against the traditions and customs of a Hindu royal family. Moreover it could even be implied as a regal hauteur. His portrayal of the Rani is unappealing and disagreeable to any Indian reader: “The lady was evidently at her ease and enjoying the occasion, as also the fragrant aroma of the mixture presented to her by her attendant, in an elegantly-shaped small hand *huqua*, which she smoked apparently with no small degree of complacency and satisfaction” (47). British sources have tactfully utilized their literary means to present the notion that the Indian ideals are sub-standard. Moreover the image of a widow from a Hindu royal family indulging in such mean activities is sure to elicit a low impression on Indian women and culture.

Language is one of the mediums of power controlled and utilized by the colonial forces in assaulting the colonized and



burdening them with colonial hegemony. The phenomenon of deploying language as a power tool in its crude form to subjugate the minds and psyche of the colonized has been observed especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, the period that immediately followed the Mutiny. Language has an excessive dominating power, with which that it could enforce either reticence or disorder, upon the intended character based on the notions and objectives of the person or source that handles it. During the period of the Mutiny, printing and publishing were solely controlled by the British, and the Indians out of fear of retribution, never attempted to print or publish the facts and realities known to them. As a result, only one side of the Mutiny has been revealed through the power of expression of the British. Thus by suppressing the language and the right of expression of the Indians, the British had subjugated them by every means.

The Mutiny narratives were a significant channel that had deployed language to meet the intentions of the colonizer. In *The Rane*, language has played a vital role in marring the character and personality of Rani Lakshmi Bai. Here language has been used to suppress her feminine might and gallantry and instead artfully portray an occidental view of a colonized female, which is erotic in nature. Luchme Bhie's sense of dressing before a white man described in *The Rane* illustrates the point, "Her bodice, freely opened in front, showed a well-shaped voluptuous bust, and terminated at the waist . . ." (47). Moreover from this kind of obscene use of language to describe a female body, the reader could understand that the author has no deference towards the subject of portrayal.

It is not anomalous for the colonizer who bears the burden of the Mutiny paranoia, revenge hysteria, anxieties and ego, to weave out fiction mixed with falsifications on any native character irrespective of their rank or gender. The Mutiny novels have drawn ideas from these sources, and have depicted their characters accordingly. Gillean's *The Rane* has utilized this theme in depicting a deglamourized version of Rani Lakshmi Bai. Any person, who had read an impartial version of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and had attempted a serious research on the historical

aspects of the Mutiny, the role of the Indian leaders and the involvement of the British in it, could only accept what Singh had noted in the 'Preface' of his *Novels on the Indian Mutiny* that, the novels written during the period of Mutiny "may sharply define British imperial necessities at periods of pressure and strain" (i). This explains the source of misrepresenting the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai in the Early Mutiny Novels.

Historiography of the Indian Mutiny recorded by the British historians of the period is to a great extent responsible for the depiction of Rani Lakshmi Bai as the Indian Jezebel. Forrest in his *Selections from the Letters* has recorded thus about the Rani, which is really a stain on her personality: "The Ranee of Jhansi was an ardent, daring, licentious woman . . . . We cannot forget she was answerable for a massacre of men, women and children . . ." (163). Kaye and Malleison have recorded: "She was urged on by hatred, by desire of vengeance, by a blood-stained conscience . . ." (*Kaye's and Malleison's* 5:144).

Other than the Early Mutiny Fiction, there was another type of fiction, which was published during the post-independence period that illustrated the Mutiny of 1857 as the theme and background. These novels that were published after the period of British reign in India, were termed as Post-Imperial Mutiny Novels. Such novels drew their sources from official reports, letters and historical narratives, unlike the early Mutiny Novels that had a first-hand impression of the scenario. George Macdonald Fraser's *Flashman in the Great Game*, published in 1975 belongs to the category of Post-Imperial Mutiny Novels. *Flashman in the Great Game* captures the historical event – Indian Mutiny of 1857 as its backdrop and covers the period from 1856 to 58. Fraser's Flashman Series novels centre on the feats of Harry Flashman – the fictional character crafted by Thomas Hughes in his novel *Tom Brown's School Days*(1857). Thomas Hughes's fictional Flashman is a bully as well as a coward, and Fraser's Flashman Series historical novels centre around this Flashman who appears as a military officer.

*Flashman in the Great Game* is a historical novel that narrates the experiences of Colonel Flashman, who has been appointed

by Lord Palmerstone to investigate the rumours of an impending rebellion in Jhansi schemed by the sepoys of the station. The novel, while unveiling the protagonist's experiences in Jhansi, also figures out his meeting with Queen Lakshmi Bai, whom he designates as "gorgeous, wicked witch Lakshmi Bai" (11). This single phrase is an ample proof to denote that the occidental concept of the Indian womanhood, mixed with beauty, brutality and sensuality remains unchanged at least in a few Western minds. This shows that the new generation British men still nurture the old colonizer-ego and revenge hysteria within their mental constitution and this thought might have found its roots from such ideas.

Several times in the novel, the protagonist uses vulgar words about the Rani, like "deceitful rebel bitch" and "stupid bitch", which reveals his attitude towards the Rani and the Indians as a whole, who had planned and supported the Mutiny against the 'lawful' British Government (272, 294). In this post-independence era, while the Indians all over the world commemorates the Mutiny of 1857 and its leaders with great awe and respect, the novelist blatantly portrays the Rani as a cruel opportunist, who was ready to deceive the people of Jhansi and enter into an agreement with the British to continue her authority. She is depicted as a symbol of promiscuity and infidelity and enters into an erroneous libidinal union with Colonel Flashman to meet her political ends. The graceless description about her continues as, "They say she keeps a harem of muscular young bucks, primed with love potions" (262).

The novel records that Lord Canning had ordered Rani Lakshmi Bai to be captured alive rather than killing her. Flashman supports this plan of Canning and appreciates it as a well regimented strategy, for killing the Rani would sometimes hail her to the level of Joan of Arc, who died in the process of defending her country against the British forces. Flashman recounts that "he (Canning) also feared the death of a young and beautiful rebel princess (for her fame and likeness had spread across India by now) might just tip the balance of public conscience – he didn't want the liberal press depicting her as

some Indian Joan of Arc” (259). The egoistic and deleterious colonial cognizance is well evident from this narration. They have deglamourized the Rani through their narratives and envisioned the world to look down upon her, through the tinted glass they have implanted towards history.

A study of the comparison of the Jezebel image of Rani Lakshmi Bai portrayed by the Early Mutiny novelists and Post-Imperial Mutiny novelists, unearth the serious fact that both these novelists continue to disparage the image and persona of the Rani based on their imaginations. The fact to be noted here is that the levels of denigration has changed with the passage of time and change of regime. While the Early Mutiny Novels try to showcase the courage and superiority of the British rulers and belittle Indian leaders, the Post-Imperial Novels do not attempt to parade the British bravery. The perceptiveness of denigration and mockery of the Indian characters has declined as the colonial regime has lost its stance. The attempt of disdaining perseveres continues of the persistence of the colonial super ego.

Indian Boadicea and Indian Joan of Arc are another set of images cast upon Rani Lakshmi Bai during the pre-independence period by the British. The source of this casting is unknown, even to the British historians. It has been remarked by Forrest in his *Selections from the Letters*: “To speak of her, as some have done, as the ‘Indian Joan of Arc’ . . .” (163). According to some sources, she has been compared to Joan of Arc by General Hugh Rose, who had been her greatest rival in the battle field (Chapman 121). Chapman has even quoted an article published by a Bombay newspaper after the death of the Rani. It has been reported that “. . . her courage shines pre-eminent, and can only be equalled, but not eclipsed by that of Joan of Arc” (120). The Rani’s inexorable courage and powerful female gallantry may be the reasons for recasting her into this image after she had attained martyrdom. While Indian Joan of Arc is a label attached as a mark of respect, the image of Indian Boadicea was imposed upon her personality for the similarity the British imagined in the image and role of the Rani in the Jokhan Bagh Massacre. These women characters from the pages of history were gallant warriors in the battle field.

This image rooted in the pre-independence era, can be assessed as one of the sources for the gradual evolution of the icon of Warrior Queen during the period of rising nationalism in the pre-independence times and later its firm positioning as an icon of national heroine, with the growth of nationalism.

To comprehend the depths of comparison initiated between Rani Lakshmi Bai/Queen Boadicea and Rani Lakshmi Bai/Joan of Arc, a hint of history is essential. According to history, Queen Boadicea (AD 25–61) was the wife of Prasutagas, the King of the Iceni tribe of ancient Britain. She led the Britons in a battle against the Roman invaders in AD 61. Her motivation to wage war, says Dosdi, “. . . came not from her prestigious lineage, nor her desire to recover her kingdom and its plunder. Instead she fought for the cause of liberty, and to avenge the humiliation the Roman centurions had caused her and to her daughters” (59).

When the Romans under Emperor Claudius invaded Britain in AD 60, the Iceni tribe that was in power was forced to surrender the kingdom to the Romans. At that time Prasutagas, the Iceni King had entered into an agreement with Claudius, the Roman Emperor that half of the kingdom would be managed by the Iceni, and the Romans could take over the other half. After the death of King Prasutagus, the agreement was denied by the Roman Government. They refused to pass it over to the natural claimants – Queen Boadicea and her daughters Camorra and Tasca. While the British law sanctioned royal inheritance to women, the Roman law did not. The Romans denied Boadicea’s share of the kingdom and moreover Boadicea was harassed and her daughters were brutally raped (Dosdi 60). Boadicea recruited an army, acquired armaments and chariots, and organized an attack against the invaders. She slaughtered the Romans and even scorched a Roman colony. The Romans, who were stronger in their armed forces than the Iceni, subdued the rebels. Boadicea and her daughters committed suicide before the Romans could reach them. The history of Queen Boadicea is almost similar to that of Rani Lakshmi Bai. The two female warriors fought for a righteous cause to account for the humiliation they faced at the hands of the colonial powers.

Another historical personage with whom Rani Lakshmi Bai merits comparison is Joan of Arc (1412-31), a French peasant girl of nineteen years, who commanded the French army against the English, to drive them away from her native land. She was an illiterate peasant girl, who informed the French King Charles VII in 1428, that if he trusted her words and provided her with munitions and people, she would take the lead in driving the English from the French soil. The King trusted her and she succeeded in ousting the foreign powers from Orleans in ten days. In her second endeavour, while pursuing the English from Paris, she was wounded and handed over to the English by a soldier. She was confined in a secular prison, watched over by men who were debauched and immoral in character. This incarceration was the depths of degradation, as she was intensely pious in spirit. In the trial that followed, she was found guilty of wearing male attire, which she had been wearing during the time of the combat. It is not recorded anywhere whether she was allowed to wear that dress while in prison or “whether Joan simply put on clothes to cover her body as she stood naked before her guards is unknown” (Dosdi 74). She was professed as a “relapsed heretic” and burnt at the stake on 30 May 1431 (Dosdi 74). Years later, in 1456, the verdict was repealed vindicating her, and in 1920, she was declared a Saint of the Roman Catholic Church. Now Joan of Arc is revered as the national heroine of France, and several statues have been installed to commemorate her valorous attempts to free her country from the shackles.

While examining the histories of these three female warriors—the Rani, Queen Boadicea and Joan of Arc—several attributes common to them could be identified. The brave exploits of these women were acknowledged both by their countrymen and by their adversaries, after they had attained martyrdom. Statues were installed in honour of these amazons commemorating their timely deeds at the time of emergency. Statues and portraits of the Rani and the Queen, more or less reverberates the voice of motherhood, along with their womanhood. Joan of Arc and Rani Lakshmi Bai, who were hailed as national heroines, attained martyrdom at a very young age. Both fought for their land and

people, but did not live to see the freedom of their country from British shackles.

A common factor that recurs in the cases of these three women warriors is the fight against male militarism and the law-making power of man that tried to subjugate the female might and suppress their voice. These two factors can be grouped as the woman's struggle against male chauvinism. Another factor perceived common among these three historical women warriors is their righteous struggle over the rights of their land. Land is treated as a feminine paradigm, and conquering of the land by the aggressors is also a woman's issue. Land is a marker of identity that defines one's heritage, culture and conceptions as a whole. The Rani, the Queen and Joan of Arc were humiliated, degraded and alleged of deleterious attributes, since they had protested against the chauvinistic powers instigated by the rulers of their land. The Rani has been degraded as Indian Jezebel; the Queen's daughters were raped and humiliated; Joan of Arc was demeaned as a witch, her identity questioned, and at last burnt at the stake. Man's might to subjugate woman and her issues is ubiquitous in all these cases. The women in these three cases have turned to be extraordinary in power, and masculine in aspects, to defend their identity and womanhood against the male aggressors. The situations around them forced them to accept the garb of warrior queens.

The dictum personal is political that was generated with the Second Wave Feminism and Radical Feminism operates tantamount with the struggles of Rani Lakshmi Bai and Queen Boadicea against the power structures that had tried to subjugate them. In their cases the power structures are defined by gender, race and institution, which here is the colonial political set up. The struggles of these historic women that transformed their lives as the warrior queens, which the world respectfully views as the icons of warriorship and female gallantry, could be analysed through the ideologies propagated by the Second Wave Feminism and the dictum personal is political. This famous dictum was coined by the feminist activist Carol Hanisch in 1969 (Hanisch <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>). This was the title

of an essay written by Hanisch and published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. By 'political', Hanisch intended power relations in any mode, and in the beginning this dictum proposed the notion to understand the oppression of women in various spheres such as social, economic, and political as the basis of all personal problems that distressed her. This dictum proposed an unwritten notion that no individual could fight oppression without personally experiencing it. At a later stage, the dictum personal is political came to signify an ideology that strongly supported individual or personal change as a solution to collective problems (Behrent <http://isreview.org/issue/92/personal-and-political>).

When analyzed in its normative perspective, Radical Feminism focuses on the oppression of women under male supremacy, and finds the war between the sexes as the basic political issue. Vicky Randall's view on Radical Feminism affirms this fact. The Radical Feminists are of the view that while the bureaucracies and politics are male dominated power structures that exercise masculine modes of power, which offers little for the progress of women, the women should find alternative ways to defend their rights (Randall and Waylen 9). Thus they see women as agents of revolution rather than victims of subordination. The struggles of the Rani, the Queen and Joan of Arc against colonial domination manifest this ideology of Radical Feminism. Radical Feminism considers the state which is a political construct, as the sort of an abstract stratagem that upholds male dominated views and interests, by subjugating women. Thus they look at state and power from a gendered perspective. In the case of Rani Lakshmi Bai and Queen Boadicea, the male supremacy in the form of colonial intervention has subjugated them, deprived them of their identities by denying their rights in every sense. In both their cases, we find that when they were deprived of the indigenous patriarchal power and support in their lives, the colonial power has intervened to overpower their minds and lands. By conducting an epistemological analysis based on the theory proposed by Vicky Randall, the cases of the Rani and the Queen puts forth the fact that the ubiquitous presence of the masculine authority in the



mainstream colonial politics of the period has tried to shrivel the space and silence the voice of women.

The case of Queen Boadicea is challenging, as her daughters became rape victims at the hands of the invaders. Rani Lakshmi Bai was denied the property and wealth of her husband, and she was even expelled from the Jhansi fortress after the death of Raja Gangadhar Rao. She had to live on a meagre stipend that the colonial Government had allowed her. The colonial authority had created an economic dependence for the women by grabbing away the lawful land and property from them, as they were well aware of the fact that economic independence is a key factor for women's emancipation. Hence it needs to be rectified with the principle proposed by Mahatma Gandhi. According to him, "Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal capacities; she has the right to participate in the minute details of the activities of man, and she has the right of freedom and liberty as he" (qtd.in Tandon 163).

If oppression was confined within the private spheres in the case of the colonial historical women, the oppression of Queen Boadicea and Rani Lakshmi Bai had its natural repercussions in the social or public field, as they were the leaders and champions of the common people. They fought against the male superiority masked within the institution of colonial Government that had manipulated laws to suppress their rights and power, and thereby annihilating their culture and society as a whole. The colonial patriarchal powers are responsible for the transformation of Rani Lakshmi Bai, Queen of Boadicea and Joan of Arc, from their humble lives to 'warrior queens' and fight for the people and their land with renewed strength and arms. The protests of these women against the colonial male domination transmuted them into champions contesting patriarchal power domination. Epistemologically theirs was the case of female emancipation against the patriarchal overpowering for a social cause.

It can be considered as an egalitarian acknowledgement from the British when they conferred the image of Indian Joan of Arc on Rani Lakshmi Bai, whom they had once denigrated as a licentious Jezebel. While analyzing the other side, this could be

viewed as the attempt of the British to exhibit their power that pervades in various aspects like gender, sovereignty and language. The British utilized their colonial sovereignty and patriarchy in defeating Joan of Arc and Rani Lakshmi Bai despite the tremendous struggle against their authority. These women had to fight against a misogynist colonial authority for their rights and freedom. After Joan of Arc and Rani Lakshmi Bai had attained martyrdom, the British upheld their images to the world through the power of language. This could be viewed as colonial astuteness in ascertaining that the power is still vested in them and they had the power to glorify or vilify a personality at their will.

The track of transmutation of the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai from the colonial coinages of Indian Joan of Arc or Indian Boadicea to a warrior queen in the pre-independence era was simple, as this image was packed with the images of Joan of Arc and Queen Boadicea. The militant image of the Rani was deciphered in the words of Hugh Rose, when he has described her, “she was the bravest and the best military leader of the rebels. A man among the mutineers,” after she attained martyrdom (Forrest *Selections from the Letters* 164). The Indian Joan of Arc and the Indian Boadicea images had a touch of Eurocentrism in them as they were imbued with Western ideas.

During the Mutiny and the period that immediately followed it, the role played by local folk singers or *harbolas* in urging the Indian minds to fight the colonial domination is worth mentioning. The songs and legends about the Indian leaders of the Mutiny were sung to describe their audacity, belligerent spirit and determination in ousting the alien powers from the native land. The folk songs that resonated the traits of the leaders of the Mutiny were filled with spirit, and were capable of meeting the aims of the singer, which was to direct the common people towards the battle field to fight for a righteous cause. These oral literatures played a great role in carving out the image of the Rani as a Warrior Queen, as a Mother/ Guardian who fights for the rights of her son and her subjects, and also in bestowing a Goddess image upon her. The responsibility shouldered by oral literature in shaping out these various images of Rani Lakshmi

Bai, till the beginning of the twentieth century, or to be more precise, till the emergence of nationalism and the formation of its diverse divisions is worth mentioning. The capability of a mother who could take up the guardianship of the masses by fighting against the adverse powers, paved the way to exalt her image and iconize her as Goddess Durga, who annihilates the evil to preserve the good. The poems and songs composed on the Rani offers comparisons to the different variants of the Goddess, as Lakshmi the creator of wealth and luck; powerful Kali or Chandi who killed the *asuras* to retain harmony and composure. Chapman affirms that the Mother figure in Hindu culture has greater potency than the wife/Sita image (126). This helps to identify the Rani with the image of a warrior mother, as denoted by Chapman as “Shakti and Mother, the Goddess who cannot be controlled or defeated” (127).

There are no written accounts regarding the singers and composers of folk songs of the time, as these songs were publicized by word of mouth. The year of composition of the folk songs is not recorded as it has been transmitted orally. Some of these songs were sung and transmitted when the Rani commenced her open fight against the British, and certain other songs were composed after she had attained martyrdom. The former category of songs was created with a purpose to urge the people to join hands with the Indian forces to fight against colonial domination, thereby adding strength to the Indian leaders. The latter category of songs was vocalized with the word picture of the valour and determination of the young Rani in fighting the imperial powers. This has been done to motivate the patriotic spirits in the young people and thereby lead them to the battle field for the continuance of the struggle against the imperial domination till they gain the fruits of freedom.

The songs that were composed and sung soon after the Mutiny were transmitted vocally in and around Bundelkhand, and most of these verses described the Rani’s martial spirit and courage which projected her as a warrior Queen. The most popular image of the Rani that transmitted through the folk songs in local dialects in and around Bundelkhand was her fervour in overpowering the alien powers from the native land.

A perusal of a few lines of an Awadhi (dialect of Awadh / Oudh, the name of Ayodhya during 1857 Mutiny) folk song collected by Ram Naresh Shukla and translated by P.C. Joshi to include in a Bulletin of the Sahitya Academy, helps the reader to understand how the people of those days visualized the image of their Rani.

No jewels to adorn her but only patriotism  
 That glowed so brightly, her only ornament!  
 The whole world saw Lakshmibai in eighteen fifty-seven!!  
 Fate had ordained her to be a fighter in her adolescence  
 No child she had to play in her lap and wipe away her tears  
 .....  
 Encircled by English batallions was Jhansi, under fire.  
 When like an enraged lioness for vengeance, in male attire,  
 Fearless for battle left Lakshmibai in eighteen fifty-seven!  
 (qtd. in Scholberg 98)

This folk song has continued to be sung as an inspiration for the Indians to fight against the foreigners to save the land, culture and their fellow beings from colonial clutches. The singer wishes to instill the idea of patriotism in the common man's minds and hence he sings that the Rani had been wearing only a single ornament and that was patriotism that shone brightly on her. Despite her tender age, her mind had been filled with a single aim of liberating her land, and for that she fought like a lioness against the British. This powerful image of the Rani was sure to instill a patriotic spirit in the minds of the people to fight for their land. The concept of nation or nationalism had not emerged during the period of the Mutiny of 1857 and hence the local folk singers or *harbolas* disseminated such songs with the sole aim of empowering the Indian minds to join hands with their leaders to fight against the British forces.

A Bundeli folk song which has become the source of inspiration for Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's nationalistic poem "Jhansi Ki Rani" could be examined to apprehend how the folk singers have succeeded in conveying a powerful image of the Rani, and thereby generating ardent jingoistic attitudes in

the public. *Khoobladimardani, are Jhansi baariraani / Burjan-burjan top lagaadai, golaachaleaasmaani / Are Jhansi waaliraani, KhoobladiMardaani* (Rag 64). This Bundeli song has been collected and translated by Pankaj Rag and according to his translation the singer is praising the Rani as “she fought well like a man. She has wielded the cannons and the shots pierced the sky and thus valiantly she fought against the British” (64).

An examination of these folk songs on Rani Lakshmi Bai brings forth the image that the people had conceived in their minds about the Rani during those days of the Mutiny. They envisaged her as a warrior queen adept in all war techniques and fearless to face the enemy. She is a powerful warrior who fights against the enemies caring little for the limitations of her gender. Thus most of the songs convey the image that she fights like a man. This idea conveyed through folk songs leads one to associate Rani Lakshmi Bai with the image of ‘Veerangana’ that surpasses the old frame work of warrior queen.

The same warrior queen image is responsible for deriving a goddess image and the image of a concerned Mother or a guardian. This, in the later stages, has been coloured in various hues by nationalism and even by religious nationalism. In the post-Mutiny period, the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai was exalted from a warrior heroine to a warrior goddess. This may perhaps be to instill a feeling of devotion along with dedication to the aims and endeavours of the people. The singers might have thought it easy to promulgate this image and would get wide acceptance among the Hindu community, which forms the majority. They have rightly envisaged that the image of a goddess destroying evil to preserve the good, though religious in nature would propel many people to the battle field. These songs could be viewed as those composed with discernible utilitarian notions. Chapman has recorded in her collection of folk songs on Rani Lakshmi Bai, a song that compares her to the various Hindu deities. Given below is a translated version of one such folk song:

Though Lakshmi, you are Durga  
Like the Ganga purify all evil

.....

In war you are Bhairavi and Chamunda,  
 In justice most fair

.....

You are Kali,  
 Forgiving and protector of kindred  
 Death-axe to the British army. (131)

Such songs helped in associating their own Rani to the image of a Goddess, annihilating malevolence, which is here incarnated in the British, and preserving righteousness, which constitutes the Indians themselves and their good will. This gives them confidence in the battle against the British and provides an affirmation that they are performing a virtuous job. Thus the image of Mahishasura Marddini, an incarnation of Goddess Durga, who has taken birth to kill the *asura* by name Mahishasura, who had conquered the *Prithvi* (Earth) and the *Swargaloka* (Heaven) can be associated with the Rani. The divine theme proposed in the folk songs had in them a tone of assured safety. The folk singers have transformed the image of the Rani to a war goddess like Kali or Chamunda, born with an intention to safeguard her subjects from obnoxious forces. Unknowingly a divine mother image is disseminated through such songs.

Apart from these songs there are folk songs that declare the maternal qualities of the Rani that impart the message of protection and guardianship at her hands. These songs too were utilitarian in nature that urge the people to join hands with the forces of the Rani. One of the folk songs collected and translated by Pankaj Rag, displays the image of the Rani offering *jalebis* and sweet *pedas* to the soldiers, while she satiates her hunger with parched wheat and a little jaggery (64). This is a perfect mother image, where she feeds her subjects with good food on returning after a tiresome battle, while ignoring her hunger and fatigue. This image of the Rani portrayed in a folksong matches with nothing but a maternal figure. The image of a guardian or protector propagated by one of the folk singers runs thus: “Your widow’s bread is assured / I, Queen Laxmi Bai can put it / in a Royal Decree” (Joshi 59).

The images that attribute a divine nature to the Rani, such as the image of a Goddess, which in turn signifies the image of a Divine Mother can be classified as religious symbols, as these have Hindu religious overtures. The images that display maternal qualities signifying a Guardian image or a Mother image to her subjects can be termed as social symbols. In a normative sense, the folk songs of those days elicited both religious and social symbols to convince the society to work towards achieving their needs.

Even in this modern era, people are interested in the glory provided by the folk songs and legends, and they try to transmit it from one generation to the next. The glory of such songs and legends thus moves on. This admiration that remains in the common minds is well utilized while carving Rani Lakshmi Bai's image to represent her as a National Icon.

## **Notes:**

Folk songs are oral narratives and hence the line numbers and stanza forms of these verses cannot be taken to be authentic. Hence the numbers that are given within the parentheses at the end of each verse are the page numbers in which these songs appear in the text, as against the MLA Style of noting the line numbers.

## **Towards a Broader Spectrum: The Rani as a National Icon**

Nationalism is an ideology that obliges an individual to identify oneself with a feeling for one's nation. It creates the notion of cohesion and solidarity within the prescribed precincts of a nation, despite the divergence in cultural, linguistic or geographical aspects. The ideology of nationalism aids in working towards the progressive agenda of a nation and its subjects. The doctrine of nationalism, instilled in the psyche of a common man, helps him to contemplate and relate to the historical, political and cultural pasts of his nation. Aijaz Ahmed, in one of his lectures titled "Contemporary History: Colloquium on Reflections of the Electoral Mandate 2014" delivered on 11 July

2014 at the Kerala University Senate Hall, had commented that nationalism, when it originated, was anti-colonial in nature, a weapon to fight colonialism, and in fact it was the single force that united people for a common cause during the turbulent days of colonialism. He also observed that the characteristics of nationalism has transformed in the post-colonial times and has become constitutional in the present age. This section looks into the broader spectrum of Indian Nationalism— the way it could be associated with Rani Lakshmi Bai, and the modes and modalities followed by various organizations and government in sustaining the nationalistic spirit underlying the image of this legendary queen.

Nationalism has a key role to play in the process of iconization or rather in the formation of images suggesting national identity. It has been rightly said that “Iconizations and glorification of legends are actually a process or an attempt to preserve the past events and to repossess the past” (Chapman 22). This shows that the icons are not evolved as such; they are formulated with a well-defined utilitarian ideology. The symbols of colonial resistance that were formed in an anti-colonial perspective were the foundation stones that developed into icons at a later stage. The icons thus developed had assimilated the power to propose the profound notions of national integrity, sovereignty and unity in diversity, which are the fundamental themes of nationalism. Representation of the historic queen Rani Lakshmi Bai as a national icon could be viewed through this angle.

This section examines the technicalities in moulding Rani Lakshmi Bai as a national icon. While tracing the aspects of Indian nationalism and its diverse premises and principles, it seems necessary to analyse the requisites and techniques in casting the legendary queen as a National icon. This section, at the outset researches and reports how a particular women’s wing of Hindu nationalism positions the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai to arouse Hindu national consciousness and examines their purpose and mode of approach in this accomplishment. It also examines how the persona of Rani Lakshmi Bai fits into the template of a Hindu icon formulated by this wing of nationalism.



Secondly, this section looks into the print and visual media that celebrate the image of the Rani as the national heroine/icon. It also focuses upon the images of the Rani portrayed in patriotic poems, biographies and visual series (both on the silver screen and the mini screen) that project her as a national heroine. This exploration leads to an assessment on the part of the Government and the nation as a whole that tries to perpetuate the image of the Rani as a national heroine of the country. The ideas of nationalism, imagined community, religious nationalism and official nationalism, propagated by the theoreticians who propound the theory of nationalism like V.D. Savarkar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee and Benedict Anderson, constitute the structural framework of the analytical perception carried here.

The doctrine of Hindutva has been introduced and propagated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar through his famous work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* published in 1923. He launched the concept of a Hindu Rashtra and exhorted in building one such nation through this work that came out during the pre-independence period. Savarkar did not mean Hinduism in the form of religion as such in the construction of a Hindu Nation. Jaffrelot clarifies this thus: “Declaring himself as an atheist, Savarkar argued that religion was only one aspect of Hindu identity, not even the most important. In fact he draws his definition of Hindu identity out of Western theories of the nation” (15). The espousal of the occidental ideas in constructing a nation is meant merely for the “material sphere”, which constitutes the area of technology, fiscal domain, science and affairs of administration. These are the areas that the Westerners have proved to be persuasive and resilient enough to subdue the Orientals and other non-Europeans (Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* 120). According to Savarkar, “. . . the Indian identity is epitomized by Hindutva: the majority community is supposed to embody the nation, not only because it is the largest but also it is the oldest” (Jaffrelot 15). The nation constructed within such a parameter, for its progressive pace, will surely stand by its own identity, without any dispositions of the West. This ideology aided them in gaining strength to resist the powers that once subdued them.

The first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the birth of a religious nationalist wing that supported and imbibed the doctrine of Hindutva and Hindu Nation propounded by Savarkar. This particular wing of religious nationalism claims to have been formed to unite the Hindus who forms the majority of the nation and train them to work towards the goal of bringing the nation forward to the orbits of development. They established intellectuals who had great acumen regarding Indian ethics, culture, religion and epics like Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo; characters from Indian Epics like Sri Rama and Arjuna; and Hindu historical personalities like Shivaji, Tantia Tope and Pazhassi Raja who fought against colonization, as the cult figures of Hindutva, to set a role model for the youth to instill a sense of contemplation and act like them, for the progress of the nation. Along with this, they projected a few festivals like Ganeshotsav, Rakshabandhan, and Holi, that aroused a sense of communal harmony as symbols of Indian identity. Thus they tried to evoke a Hindu national consciousness through these accoutrements, for the reconstruction of the nation as a well-defined Hindu nation.

It has well been identified that this kind of reconstructing a nation was characterized by ruptures of a gendered identity. They have envisaged the proposition of building a male oriented Hindu nation, which perceived women as the mere progenitors of male children for the continuity of the race to preserve the sanctity of the nation. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the birth of a women's wing of Hindu nationalism, which followed the dogmatism of the male wing of Hindu nationalism mentioned beforehand. The concept of women as helpless mothers, who are obliged to produce virile male children and bring them up as sturdy men to safeguard their country, goes parallel to the lines of the doctrine propounded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Jain and Mahan explain the ideology observed by Swami Dayananda Saraswati that he perceived divinity in every woman, because women are blessed with the divine power to create and nurture a new generation for the sake of protecting the culture and religion of a nation (176). While this wing of Hindu nationalism, which is a male oriented group, advocated divine femininity, there came

up a women's wing of Hindu nationalism, that proposed a unique idea of ferocity combined with divinity in the feminine image, in an affirmative sense to arouse Hindu nationalistic spirits for the renaissance of a Hindu nation. However the women's wing of the Hindu nationalism followed the philosophies of its male counterpart in their ideas relating to womanhood, ascribing feminine characteristics to national symbols, and the methodology adopted in arousing a Hindu national consciousness for a Hindu nation. It is interesting to note that their attempts to preserve a unique Hindu culture never intersected with each other. The women's wing varied in its own way primarily in the grade of honour they conferred upon womanhood. Moreover, significance has been attached to women – their status and power, and efforts have been made by the nationalists during the first half of the twentieth century to draw out women from their inner selves to fight against alien aggressive powers, to win the native land, and to preserve traditional culture.

While the male oriented Hindu nationalist wing envisaged the renaissance of a Hindu nation from a man's perspective, the women's wing assessed it from a woman's perspective. The women's wing propounded a feminine image, which is protective and all-enduring, but it also was transformed into an epitome of feminine aggression, when tribulations were mounded upon her. She became reactionary to annihilate the iniquitous, in order to preserve the virtuous. In this proto-type of womanhood propounded by the women's wing of Hindu nationalism, the quality of divinity and maternity amalgamated with the quality of ferocity, as against the "powerless mother" image proposed by its male counterpart – the men's wing of Hindu nationalism. The women's wing utilized this powerful feminine image in creating a Hindu national consciousness to create and preserve the culture of a Hindu Nation. By exhibiting such feminine images as icons they intend to disseminate the idea that a Hindu woman should have an integrated vision of domesticity combined with nationalistic fervour to preserve the future of their nation. Such ideas aided them in projecting Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi as one of the icons of a Hindu nation or rather a nationalist heroine. This section tries to examine how far the persona of the Rani,

based on the pronouncements of this particular women's wing, fits within the template of a national heroine formulated by them, and also how far they have succeeded in arousing a Hindu national consciousness based on this icon.

Bacchetta who has done an extensive research on Hindu nationalism and its ideologies has recorded that the women's wing has drawn ideas from ". . . Tilak's notion of specifically Hindu national liberation. From Swami Vivekananda . . . that woman is a nationalist issue and that women are nationalist agents. From Mahatma Gandhi, . . . it extracts the view that women should determine their own future and the future of the nation" (18). The image of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, who fought against the colonial powers to safeguard her domain and restore the throne of Jhansi from falling into the hands of alien powers could be analysed in these terms, and this spirit of patriotism combined with audacity exhibited by the Rani have influenced the women's wing to uphold her image as a nationalist heroine. The image of the Rani could also be projected as a prototype for the transformation from an archetypal helpless mother figure to an over-powering fierce female warrior figure that has assimilated the strength to re-capture what has been detained from her – land, rights and even heritage. By incarnating herself as the paradigm of fierce femininity or as an incarnation of the war goddess, she fought against the colonial powers to win back the pedigrees, to conserve them for her subjects and for the perseverance of the identity of her nation. Her feats in the battle field invoked the image of the war-goddess Chandika / Kali, who has been incarnated with the motive to obliterate the wanton, and protect the worthy for the prospective generation.

The Rani, who fought for the rights of her son, actually visualised this issue as a nationalist cause, and thus allocating herself as a nationalist agent she laboured for the liberation of her nation. The Rani's Guardian/Mother image towards her son, as well as towards her nation and her subjects could be assessed from this. Performance of the role of a guardian in the domestic and public domains has outlined the individuality of the Rani. The identity of the Rani serves as a polysemic image, as underlined

in the doctrines of the women's wing of Hindu nationalism – Divinity, Ferocity and Maternity (Bacchetta 18).

The Rani, who worked towards the realisation of national liberation by posing herself as a national agent suits the paradigmatic figure of a national heroine that stalwartly evokes national consciousness. This hypothesis deciphers how the image of the Rani serves as the prototype of a national icon as per the doctrinal values upheld by the women's wing of Hindu nationalism. Several judgments could be set forth to corroborate the reasons for the women's wing of Hindu nationalism to assess the Rani as a Hindu ruler of a Hindu nation. The most authoritative among them could be the portraiture of the Rani and her Jhansi that have been disseminated through the oral literature of 1857. The folk songs that were sung praising the efforts of the Rani in the Mutiny portrayed her and Jhansi within the folds of traditional Hindu culture. A perusal of one of the folk songs clarifies this idea:

The Bai Sa'ab of Jhansi  
Magnificent stands her fort  
In the interior is Adi Bhavani's court  
And the idol Shiva Shankar unique in its beauty  
With Ganesh the son of Gauri, little temple besides  
For Bhairon, you can see  
The BaiSa'ab of Jhansi.(Joshi 43)

This is one of the folk songs that help in identifying the fact that the rulers of Jhansi and a major section of the Jhansi principality believes in Hinduism and follows the culture and values disseminated through Hinduism.

Moreover Farhat Hasan in his essay "Religion in the History of 1857" has recorded that the early nationalist writings has commented upon the impact of the existence of religious identifications during the Mutiny of 1857 (137). Hasan explicates the simple yet composite phase of formulating religious icons by the religious nationalists thus:

. . . increasingly after the 1920s . . . there was an iconic idealization of the rebel leaders as invested with both a nationalist consciousness and a religious identity. In the period after 1920s, the rebel leaders such as Rani Laxmi Bai and Nana Sahib were re-invented in the nationalist literature (and paintings) not only as “national heroes”, but also as ideal representatives of an exclusively religious identity.

From the 1960s . . . in popular memory – in films, folklore and literature – the revolt was still seen through the prism of faith, and figures like Rani Laxmi Bai continued to be portrayed as heroes fighting for the protection of both the nation and their religion. (137)

The nationalist groups in a broad-spectrum—be it ingrained in religious, cultural, political or social agendas that originated in the pre-independence period—in their efforts to uproot the capricious colonial policies, and particularly labouring for the deracination of colonial assertiveness to a self-defined postulate of national liberation, has adopted several methodologies to achieve their ultimate goals of liberation and emancipation. By assigning a religious individuality to Rani Lakshmi Bai, and defining her in terms of a nationalist icon, the women’s wing of Hindu nationalism too has travelled along this line of thought.

It is generally believed that women have an inclination to protect their culture and thereby defend the status of their nation. The women’s wing was aware of the fact that in order to materialize this goal, they should be ready to destroy the unsolicited alien negative factors that hinder the developmental aspects of their nation. Moreover, Abbott confirms that the women’s wing of Hindu nationalism stressed the domesticity of women along with their nationalistic aspects. It is because of this preference that alongside the martial training that could mould them as brave leaders, the women were given training to perform their duties as women, mothers and carers of family (243). Rani Lakshmi Bai is an *apropos* figure in whom the domestic elements coalesce with the nationalistic aspects. The Rani was an obedient daughter, dutiful wife, loving mother, astute ruler and a powerful

warrior who posed as a brave leader and battled for the rights of her son, subjects and her nation.

The women's wing had espoused certain mode of propaganda to instill the zeal in women's minds to protest against the vices and protect the virtuous, drawing inspiration from the character of Rani Lakshmi Bai – the image of whom they iconized and proposed as a nationalist heroine. By extracting the accepted wisdom dispersed through the oral literature of 1857, the women's wing of Hindu nationalism composed prayer songs on Rani Lakshmi Bai. These songs portray the Rani in a divine perspective that recalls her martial qualities in battle field. An analysis of one of these prayer songs well explains the idea.

Your name Rani Lakshmi Bai, is so sacred  
We remember it in the early hours of dawn,  
The name of a woman worthy of retelling,  
The name of a woman worthy of being followed by all.  
Your image shall be in our minds forever,  
Your legend respected everywhere  
Your memory fresh in mind eternally  
Your ideal practised by all for all time to come.

(Chapman 133-34)

Such songs like the above one, demonstrate the concept of Ferocious Divine Femininity—an attribute hidden in the minds of every mother who seems to be powerless from their outer looks but are sung to bring forth the hidden strength and courage in them. Powerful images of Rani Lakshmi Bai were displayed and her acts of gallantry celebrated in valorous tones by the women's wing with the aim of urging every Hindu woman to come forward to work together for the realization of their goal. With the aid of such image, they tried to generate a powerful icon before the public, to inculcate the notion that divine power and feelings of nationalism is vested in every Hindu woman. Each woman should realize this, and posing themselves as agents of nationalism, they should work towards the materialization of a nation and culture – pure and traditional in its perspective. With

the aid of icons, they intend to create an awakening among the women that they are dexterous enough to create an affirmative stir in the society and are capable enough to liberate the society from negative forces.

The maternal/guardian image combined with the warrior qualities exhibited in several of the present day paintings and statues offer a nationalistic image to her. This kind of individuality is necessary for the unity of a nation, which would further lead the nation and its people to progressive aspects, and even promote the evolution of the nation as a better place for living and understanding. However, Partha Chatterjee propounds a positive factor in conferring a divine-maternal identity to a nationalist icon. According to him, such an aspect granted to a feminine image would liberate it from the frames of sexuality and abet that image to move further outside the domestic world, disseminating positive ideas to work towards the progress of a nation (*The Nation and its Fragments* 130-31). By creating a nationalist icon devoid of any kind of sectarian creed is like an assurance given to the society that it would lead the nation to attain the ultimate goals of progress and self-reliance without exhibiting discrimination at any level. While employing an idea or an identity as an icon with an aim to represent it as a nationalist identity, concern should be given to see that it should cater to the creeds and philosophies of the entire society, for the overall development of the nation.

The formulation and proliferation of the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai as a national icon, stemmed during the colonial period for propagating a patriotic consciousness, and situated with an intention to serve as the mark of a strong anti-colonial propaganda, needs to be analysed further in the second half of this section. It further probes into the various modalities of the nationalistic image of the Rani that is still been propagated in the post-colonial period, devoid of any sectarian beliefs or without being associated with any deific role, function or image upon the character. An endeavor to understand how the individuality of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi as a nationalist icon helps in perpetuating the concept of national unity and integrity and in disseminating the idea of Unity in Diversity – the motto of Indian



Nationalism – is put forth here. The section also investigates the methods in formulating this identity of Rani Lakshmi Bai. Cooperation from the part of the Government and contribution from the side of the people, which include historians, artists, film makers and politicians in sustaining the image of the Rani as a national icon or a national heroine is analysed and investigated along the principles of nationalism.

As against the American cultural historian George Mosse's theory of masculinizing nation and the idea of nationalism, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore portrayed woman as an icon of Indian tradition during the period of anti-colonial struggles. The nation itself has been gendered in feminine terms and acknowledged the femininity of the nation in reverential terms as Mother India or Bharat Mata by these Indian Nationalists (Nayar 123). The aim of granting feminine images to national symbols and even stipulating a feminine image to the nation as a whole during the period of anti-colonial resistance was to evoke an urge in the women's minds that their power should also be utilized in safeguarding the nation as it has been depicted in her name. Epistemologically examining this idea of granting feminine image to the nation and its symbols is a psychological approach towards the woman to draw her out to the public sphere to fight for her nation, which was configured as a helpless mother figure.

The significant fact regarding the portrayal of Bharat Mata is that the feminine image granted to her by the nationalists of the late nineteenth century is a combination of an 'endearing maternal' image – the epitome of love, care and concern – and a 'warrior mother' image that signifies the power of total annihilation. The polysemic image of the nation that has been formulated during the peak periods of anti-colonial struggles, which brings out the dual power of femininity, can be considered as the inherent implication to every Indian woman that, though they are within the domestic domicile, they have the power to fight against the colonial powers. This image in a way encouraged the participation of many women in the struggle of independence with two main intentions—one was to recover their traditional culture that has

been corroded due to its constant touch with an alien culture, which has been coerced upon them from centuries. Secondly, they were aware of the fact that this recovery of tradition and culture would be possible only by expelling the colonial powers. These two motives urged them to work towards the liberation of Bharat Mata.

This kind of a polysemic image that has been cast upon the nation is utilized in the delineation of the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai to project her as a national heroine or as a national icon by the anti-colonial nationalists of the late nineteenth century. The Rani's Warrior-Mother image is analogous to the image of Bharat Mata – as a sacrificing, loving motherhood combined with detrimental rebelliousness. This image of the Rani is intentionally evoked through folk songs that emanated during and immediately after the Mutiny of 1857, as part of anti-colonial perception with an aim to evoke xenophobic assertiveness in the minds of the Indians to fight the British forces. The image of the Rani and the Bharat Mata were derived by the nationalists with almost the same targets – to intensify the anti-imperial feelings and utilize the women power in the battle field during periods of emergency. This leads to the point derived by Ania Loomba regarding Feminism and Nationalism that, “National fantasies, be they colonial, anti-colonial or postcolonial, also play upon the connections between women, land or nations . . .” (180). She continues with her point of analysis that resistance itself is imagined as feminine in anti-colonial imaginations, to give it an added significance (180).

A maternal image is usually granted to a personality of national acclaim who is exemplified with the essence of love, sacrifice or to the epitomised level of the attainment of martyrdom. When the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai is analysed along these lines, it is deciphered that she embodies the spirit of love and dedication towards her subjects and the nation as a whole; and in the domestic level towards her son. This love and dedication led her to fight against the colonial forces and thereby paved way for her martyrdom. Thus the image of the Rani fits into the template of motherhood. As a national heroine, the Rani is viewed and

venerated in her maternal image, but this maternal image is combined with the aggressive potential of a warrior, which makes the icon still more appealing and persuades it to cross the limits of time and gets established with the same vigour, possessing the attributes of the present era and remain as a strong icon that upholds the fervour of femininity even in this century. The belligerent warrior image infused in the Rani image symbolises destruction, but it is a positive power of destruction for the sake of construction and preservation. The power of destruction is targeted towards the colonial powers to reconstruct the nation, and preserve its values and tradition.

Another way of perceiving this warrior image is from a masculine angle. This is because the attributes of a warrior are traditionally linked as male features and consider it as a masculine image. When the audacious warrior image of the Rani, which is regarded as a masculine trait, conjoins with a virtuous feminine trait of the maternal image, an androgynous image analogous to the amalgamation of Prakrithi and Purusha which symbolizes the eternal whole is evolved. This could be explicated in such a way that, both masculine and feminine powers are necessary for the eternal perpetuation of the universe. Chapman has commented that, “The Rani’s wearing of male battle regalia is related to the theme of the Hindu deity as androgyne . . . . The androgyne in Hinduism is . . . significant . . . connoting wholeness rather than decadence . . .” (124). This polysemic iconography granted upon the persona of Rani Lakshmi Bai is disseminated through paintings and statues in the form of the Rani on horseback in military outfit wielding a sword in her hand ready to pursue a battle, with her son tied safely to her back. While this image is shown in pictures, statues and imprints, the print and visual media elaborate this image of the Rani with the aid of words, sound effects, music and reflections on screen, thus sustaining the spirit of patriotism and national consciousness in the minds of the common people. However, her image being presented as a warrior mother, or as a warrior queen creates an affirmative wave in the Indian minds and raises their spirits to live respectfully and fearlessly. It has been observed that:

Lakshmi Bai is the best known example of a regent queen, still the only category of women to hold a respectable position in books . . . . Lakshmi Bai combined heroic valour with spirited action to preserve the throne of her son, exactly the right combination to be approved by nationalist historians.

(qtd. in Jain and Mahan 275-76)

Tanika Sarkar examines the reason for Indian Nationalism in its anti-colonial form, ascribing and conferring maternal image to the nation and its closely associated resources, in her *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*. She arrives at the conclusion that when the pressure and burden exerted by the powers of colonisation become excruciating for the natives, they consequentially becomes overwhelmed by the desire to embrace their indigenous cultural pasts. This could be interpreted as an intrinsic desire to return to the lap of their mother to experience the warmth of love and concern, and to remain safely in an affable and protective zone, where the child is undifferentiated from its mother (253). Sarkar continues to probe into details of a nationalistic figure taking up a warrior image, for which it has been explained that the image of a woman armed with weapons like the goddess of annihilation projects her innate strength and her capacity to start and sustain a violence in its massive might, which could lead to total devastation. She is possessed with a supra-potential attitude to win back the honour of her nation and make it a safe place of residence for the people (256). These dual qualities when combined in the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, in whose persona these attributes harmonize well enough to form a uniform whole, abets to inspire the people of the nation to march forward to achieve their respective goals. When the whole nation gets inspired by the image and persona of the Rani, she could well be established as the heroine of the nation or as the national icon. This image can also be interpreted as a message to every woman, that she has her own powers and aptitudes, and only thing is that she should put an effort to identify it. Once she becomes conscious of this fact, it would help her to redefine her identity and strengthen her to overcome the obstacles and helps her to accomplish what she aspires in her life.

The advent and flourish of print culture resulted in the germination of a genus of literature that was specially intended to evoke firm nationalist consciousness in the people. The revolutionary nationalists worked on print literature to disperse their ideas regarding nationalism and thereby inspire more people to come under their ideology. Chapman affirms that several poems, fiction and plays on Rani Lakshmi Bai that brings out her valour, duty, dedication and sacrifice for her nation were written and published by minor publishing firms in Calcutta during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to spread the theme of nationalism and burn the embers of the zest for liberation in the minds of the common men.

Chapman writes about a group of writers called Bharatendu, who were active in Jhansi during the 1870s and 1880s. They were specialised in political satires on the theme of 1857 Mutiny and projected the Rani of Jhansi as the leader of the people (145). Such satirical works were useful in conveying the intended knowledge or ideology to make people of the late nineteenth century, who still lived under the colonial clutches, aware of their corrupted political, fiscal and social situations. In the pre-independence period the rebellious image of the Rani inspired a group of revolutionary nationalists. The revolutionary spirit was mainly embraced by students and youth, who took an initiative in reading and acting out the Indian literary works banned by the British, which spoke volumes about the Indian leaders who fought against the British during the Mutiny of 1857. Chapman asserts that the Rani became “valor’s new epiphany” (145). The case of Chandrasekhar Azad, who is acclaimed as a revolutionary nationalist of the early twentieth century, is worth mentioning. Azad, who lived near Jhansi, was inspired by the charisma and courage of the Rani in dealing with the British forces. He was inspired by the statue of the Rani installed in Jhansi by his close associate Rudra Narain Singh that brought out her rebellious potential. This evoked his revolutionary spirits and became part of several revolutionary activities against the British powers like the Kakori conspiracy of 1926, the shooting of Saunders at Lahore in 1928 and the Assembly bomb incident of 1929.

As against the oral literature, the most affirmative factor regarding the print culture is that, in addition to strengthening the modes of language, it paved way for the wide spread dissemination of the intended ideology resulting in the exchange and extraction of its results much easier. Another merit of print culture that contributed to the propagation of nationalist spirit was that it helped in references and cross examinations at a future period for regaining the same spirit. If this was intended to evoke a xenophobic attitude in the minds of the common people during the pre-independence or an acute colonial period, in the post-independence period, these literatures served to sustain the spirit of nationalism and patriotism by exhibiting the valorous deeds of the nation's historic personages. This also helps the modern nation to mould an icon out of such personages to represent the nation as a whole so that it could impart the message of history, heroism, culture and tradition. Even today, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's poem "Jhansi ki Rani" published in 1928 evokes the atmosphere and spirit of nationalism of the anti-colonial times. The inspiration for this poem has been drawn from a folk song of 1857, which the poet acknowledges through the refrain "*Bundeley Harbolon key munbhamneysunikahanithi, / Khoobladimardaniwob to Jhansi wali Rani thi*" (<[http://allpoetry.com/Jhansi-Ki-Rani-\(With-English-Translation\)>](http://allpoetry.com/Jhansi-Ki-Rani-(With-English-Translation)>)). More than this folk song, the poem received much attention during the period of anti-colonial struggle and was highly acclaimed as a powerful poetic composition that embodied strong nationalist fervour. This is sung in honour of the Rani even in the present day and it is also prescribed as a study material in schools all over India, which would introduce the intended nationalist ideology to the upcoming generations by didactic means. When analysed along the lines of Partha Chatterjee, Chauhan's above mentioned poem can be considered as an element of an 'ideological ensemble' that refers to a colonial history, which has been revised and reviewed in an innovative method by the official nationalism of the postcolonial nation state (*The Indian Postcolonial* 19). When perceived from this angle proposed by Chatterjee, official nationalism takes up two functional modes – pedagogical and performative. When a school picks up an element from the ensemble that explains the

pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial history as study material to educate the younger generation about past histories, thereby opening up new panoramas towards the post-colonial world, this becomes the pedagogical mode of official nationalism. Thus Chauhan's poem on Rani Lakshmi Bai, prescribed and taught in schools to educate children about the colonial history, and thereby to strengthen their ties with their nation and nationalist spirits, can be considered as the pedagogical form of official nationalism. The delineation of the struggles of this heroine of past imparts the basic knowledge to the younger generations that they are entrusted with the task of preserving the freedom of their country, which has been transferred to them with much difficulty from the colonial hands, by compatriots like the Rani of Jhansi. This not only influences them to become dutiful citizens of tomorrow, but also perceives and acknowledges the Rani in the iconic mould of Indian Nationalism – as the saviour of the nation, defender of integrity, destroyer of injustice, guardian of the ancient tradition and above all as the model of female gallantry.

Chatterjee explains that the official nationalism within an institutional ambit takes up its performative mode when they put up “. . . events that play out the simultaneous and equal participation in national space of diverse groups of Indians . . .” (*The Indian Postcolonial* 20). The theme which they try to impart through such performative nationalism is unity in diversity and the necessity to perpetuate the spirit and fervour of nationalism. Dances and plays on Rani Lakshmi Bai staged on the occasions marking national importance like Independence Day or Republic Day celebrations can be grouped under the performative mode of official nationalism. Such performances try to propagate the spirit of nationalism, female valour and show the graceful way in which she handled authority and power in her struggles to expel the foreign powers from the native land. Any visual representation of the gallantry of Rani Lakshmi Bai offers a graceful viewing experience of the above mentioned qualities structured within the performative modes of official nationalism.

An empirical analysis of the publication and circulation of poems, plays and pamphlets describing the valorous spirit of the

Rani, projecting her as the guardian of the nation, and destroyer of the intruding colonial powers during the pre-independence period aimed in stirring the xenophobic spirits of the common man. This could act as an inspiring factor for the common man to work towards the formation of a power structure for the nation by uprooting the existing foreign authority. The attitude of nationalism underwent a discernible amendment with the achievement of independence. The modalities of presenting the images of Rani Lakshmi Bai in literature and other mediums of communication underwent certain changes. The Rani in the image of a warrior mother gained more of a popularity and admiration in the post-independence period and thus it came to be depicted in paintings and statues liberally during this period. This does not mean that the statues and pictures depicting her as a warrior mother were absent during the pre-independence period, but it gained more prominence during the post-independence period. In the same way, audio-visual art forms like film and dance performances performed during the post-independence period sometimes projected her as a warrior rather than as a mother. However the fact gets acknowledged that the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai has transformed to a strong icon that has acquired the capability to disseminate and instill the fervour of nationalism and patriotism in the minds of every Indian.

The appellation of Rani Lakshmi Bai was an inspiration for rebellious nationalism during the pre-independence period. Subhash Chandra Bose had organized a female contingent of the INA with the Indian women of Malaya, Singapore and Burma in 1942 with an aim to overthrow the British Raj from India. He named this women's regiment Rani of Jhansi Regiment that reflected his idea of collating the themes of nationalism and feminism, to fight against the powers of the British. Bose's intention behind the organisation of this women's regiment was to groom Indian women like the heroic Rani of Jhansi for a nationalist cause. The history of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, who acted as the "resuscitator of a dying country", inspired Bose to establish a women's regiment in her name, and proudly declare that "no power on earth could hold a nation in subjection which consisted of such intrepid women" (Hills and Silverman 749).



This in fact explicates how the image and history of the Rani had paved way for a nationalist cause during the pre-independence times.

Several biographies, films and television series came out in the post-independence era commemorating the identity of the Rani as a rebellious warrior, protector of the nation and conservator of feminine values. This image has been projected to sustain the patriotic spirits in the Indians, and to bring them together, irrespective of caste, class or gender and to construct a nation that proclaims the motto of Unity in Diversity. The advantage of retelling the history of a period or a persona via electronic visual media that includes films and television series over the print media is that it could transfer the ideology intended by the author to the viewer directly through images. Whereas in the case of print media, the reader has to convert words into images to comprehend the ideology. This advantage has brought together a massive community towards the electronic visual medium of film and especially the television series that retold the history and struggles of the Rani. The heroic struggle of the Rani has been presented on silver screen and small screen that were viewed and appreciated by patriotic spirits. The movie on Rani Lakshmi Bai came under the title *The Tiger and the Flame* released in 1953 and the television series that portrayed the history of Rani Lakshmi Bai under the title *Ek Veer Stree ki Kahaani: Jhansi ki Rani* was aired by Zee TV in Hindi in 525 episodes during 2009-11. The films and the television series portray the history of the colonial era with the serious aim to transfer the ambience of an anti-colonial society and the pressure undergone by the people, land, tradition and culture as a whole, to the inner psychology of the modern man. When this colonial experience of the Indians gets successfully transmitted into the minds of the common people of this era, it becomes easy to disperse the ideology concealed within the frames of each visual image they transmit—the ideology needed for the reinforcement of the existence of unity within the diversifying forces that prevail in the form of religion, language, education, occupation, rank, class, colour and economy. Such works of art render a visual image of the bygone era, in which even a man's basic need for liberation has been kept under

control by a foreign power structure, which intruded into the Indian society due to the pre-existence of disunity and other misconceptions. Thus a historical drama aired on big screen and small screen propagates the idea of unity in diversity by depicting the hazardous nature of a colonial society. Such historical drama usually concentrates on a certain period and a personage to convey the message successfully. Like the film *The Tiger and the Flame*, the television series *Ek Veer Stree ki Kahaani: Jhansi ki Rani* too focused upon transmitting the ideology of nationalism, and projected the image of the Rani as a national heroine who laboured to bring forth unity among the people to oust colonial super powers. This even endorses the image of the Rani as a national icon.

The image of the Rani conveyed through the big screen and small screen creates greater impact in the minds of the people and helps in broadcasting the spirit and essence of nationalism. This contemplation on patriotism and nationalism brings together the people to stand for the nation, and work towards its welfare. This case could be read thus by applying the theory of Anderson: the people in this vast nation do not know each other, but the spirit of oneness, the urge to support the essence of nationalism created by the history of Rani Lakshmi Bai brings them together and creates an Imagined Community (6). This elevates the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi to the status of a symbol of nationalism, as one who has ignited this spirit during the period of 1857.

The post-independence period witnessed a liberal tendency in the publication of biographies as well as historical novels, focussing on the subject of Rani Lakshmi Bai and her Jhansi compared with the pre-independence times. A comparison of the portraiture of the Rani during the pre-independence period to the post-Independence period in literature shows that a keen metamorphosis has taken place in the delineation of the character of the Rani. While Savarkar's portraiture of the Rani represents a rebellious outlook towards the colonial powers, the Rani of Mahasweta Devi, Tapti Roy or Jaishree Misra represents the image of a homely retainer of traditions who bears a stern outlook in her views regarding the politics and the liberation of

her nation. The independent India publishing bounteous works on the Rani itself is an affirmative sign of accepting and saluting the power of the Rani as an audacious woman warrior, an able administrator and a keen guardian of the nation and her subjects – the aura of which could be preserved as an icon of the nation to show it to the future generations. The fame of the Rani and her might and spirit had also attracted authors from outside India, which made them publish works on the Rani as a salute to her personality – to name a few – *The Rani of Jhansi: A Study of Female Heroism in India* (1986) by Joyce Lebra Chapman, *The Rani of Jhansi: Rebel against Will* (2007) by Rainer Jerosch and the recent novel *Rebel Queen* (2015) by Michelle Moran. Moreover, the strenuous job undertaken by the Indian litterateurs in translating the eyewitness account of Vishnu Bhatt Godshe's *Mazha Pravās* from Marathi to English that provides a diverse and authentic version of the history of the Rani and the fall of Jhansi, shows the dedication and passion that independent India showers upon the legendary queen.

A few post-independence works on the Rani written by Indian authors could be scrutinised to comprehend how the post-independent India perceives and positions Rani Lakshmi Bai in the schemata of nationalist tendencies. *The Queen of Jhansi* (1956) (the original version was in Bangla) by Mahasweta Devi, narrates the history of the Rani by relating it to the land of Bundelkhand—its oral literature, history and culture, and creates an emotional cohesion between the reader and the Rani. Her narrative style that differs from any other Indian biographer of the Rani leads the reader to concede along with the locals of Bundelkhand, whom Devi has spoken to, for the purpose of this work, that: “*Bai Sahaba jarur jinda houni*”, which means that their Bai saheba is certainly alive (Devi xv). She analyses the history of the Rani from a common man's perspective, or in her view from a “. . . subaltern point of view. To evaluate a war in history one has to take into account the views of the people who pay for the war; emotionally, physically and financially . . . history comes alive authentically through the oral tradition” and submits an iconic image of the Rani in the domain of Indian Nationalism (Devi 273). The method adopted by Devi to reveal the history

and struggles of the Rani with the support of the oral tradition of Bundelkhand from the perspective of the locals of Bundelkhand may be to project the Rani as the leader of the common mass. This idea serves to evoke the feeling that this image of the Rani could serve to thrust her position as a national heroine.

Another work worth mentioning is a historical fiction by Jaishree Misra titled *Rani* (2007). Misra has recorded in the 'Author's Note' of this novel that she has presented the Rani as ". . . a fascinatingly modern woman, with passions and relationships that were completely recognizable and a story with enormous appeal for our own times" (vi). Despite its historical content and attractive mode of narration, the novel has been banned in Uttar Pradesh, accused of having a fabricated subplot that depicted the progression of an affair of the Rani with the political agent of Jhansi, Major Ellis. This affair was illustrated in all its purity, within the borders of stipulated decorum, and the author also has noted in the Author's Note that she has utilized her creative licence in creating certain imaginary characters and situations for the sake of her novel (vi). The book was proscribed in Uttar Pradesh on the grounds that it was intolerable for the people of Bundelkhand to read such fabrications about the Rani. This incident defines the Indian approach towards the Rani, as an image of honour and reverence, befitting a patriotic schemata. A similar incident occurred with regard to the broadcasting of certain episodes of *Ek Veer Stree ki Kahaani: Jhansi ki Rani*. The historians and scholars of Jhansi protested against the historical inaccuracies and erroneous mode in depicting the life of the Rani through the visual media. Based on Episode 237 that depicted the bedroom scene of Raja Gangadhar Rao and Rani Lakshmi Bai, Dr. A.K. Pandey, Director, State Museum, Jhansi, made his furious comment that "Rani Lakshmi Bai is like a goddess to us and seeing her story presented in a distorted manner is painful. Showing intimate bedroom scenes in *Jhansi ki Rani* is also unacceptable. I feel that makers of the serial should understand that they cannot distort historical facts just for the sake of TRPs" (Jha, *The Times of India* August 18, 2010). This incident assiduously proclaims that the Rani lives as a national heroine in the minds of the people, and they do not wish to attend to

her history compromised in any manner that goes beyond the structural framework of patriotism and nationalism.

The act of shedding blood for one's country is packed with archetypal and archaic connotations. Blood itself is a symbol packed with heavy connotations, as it is a life-providing and life-ending source. When the symbol of blood is associated with the charter of a country that leads to the accomplishment of martyrdom, for the realisation of the principles connected with the country and its subjects, it scales the heights of eminence. Blood, as a symbol related to the country, takes up the role of a life-ending source, when a martyr attains martyrdom for the sake of his country. At the same time, when the process of martyrdom is observed as a manifestation to provide strength and verve to his countrymen to continue their efforts for the attainment of their goals, blood becomes a life giving source. Based on the notion of the attainment of martyrdom by shedding blood, Chapman comments that: "Death for a cause, either in battle, or at the hands of an oppressor, is a catalyst for metaphoric purification. Anyone who sheds blood for a just cause proves for all time his or her mettle" (120). Moreover Anderson speaks about sacrificing for one's country as the purest of the affairs. In his words, "The idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality" (144). This assiduously puts forth the idea that a person who stands for his country till his last drop of blood signifies an attainment of virtuousness through his martyrdom. Thus the principle for which he has exhorted, and the fervour that he has dispersed, should be immortalised for the sake of future generations. The government and the administrative mechanisms have made provisions to venerate, celebrate, maintain, institutionalise and archive the memories, and even give them the status of a national treasure with an aim to perpetuate social, moral and patriotic concepts to future generations. This also presents a paradigmatic view of the country to the entire world. The memories of Rani Lakshmi Bai have thus been preserved by the government and administrative contrivances to give the image of the Rani a national status, and to postulate it as a national icon.

The government has adopted several measures to preserve the memory of the Rani and give it a national status. The name and image of the Rani is echoed all over India in the form of awards, government schemes, institutions and effigies to recreate the ruminations of the past era in the Indian psyche. Several methods are thus adopted to pay due honour to this luminary and thereby elevate her image to the level of an icon embodying the essence of Indian nationalism. Several colleges and universities that span across our country run by the government are named after the legendary warrior queen. To name a few - Rani Lakshmi Bai Central Agricultural University in Jhansi, Rani Lakshmi Bai Medical College affiliated to Bundelkhand University, Rani Lakshmi Bai College in Meerut, Gwalior, Jhansi, Delhi, Indore, Lucknow, Parola and Hisar and Rani Lakshmi Bai Physical Training College in Gwalior and in Trivandrum, Kerala are some among the few. Apart from this, Uttar Pradesh Government has announced a pension scheme under the name of this legendary heroine – Rani Lakshmi Bai Pension Scheme – that assures an income for families below the poverty line. Roads in several Indian cities like Mysore and Delhi are named after the Rani. The Government of India has issued two commemorative stamps honouring Rani Lakshmi Bai – the first one was issued on 15 August 1957 on the centenary of the Mutiny of 1857, that depicted the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai on horseback and the other was on 5 September 1988.

The prominence attached to the celebration and commemoration of the birth and death anniversaries of Rani Lakshmi Bai shows the deference attached to her image. Another important feature that points out Rani Lakshmi Bai as an asset to the nation as accepted by the Government of India is the step taken from the administrative and managerial side of the Indian Government in archiving and maintaining the components of an assemblage that is adept enough to cast the image of the Rani as a national icon. The official correspondences between the Rani and the British officers during the period of the Mutiny, the documents concerning the decree that announced the annexation of Jhansi, the papers regarding the Rani's pension issued by the British government, the newspapers of the period that reported

the struggles of the Rani, manuscripts and typescripts that contained the official details of Jhansi and the Rani are considered as national treasures and archived in state and national archives. Several of her rare paintings and photographs are conserved in the art museum controlled by the government. It is a known fact that archiving and maintaining is an obligatory step adopted to preserve the memory of an image or a period as a whole. Only with the perpetuation of the memory, an identity could be carved for an image, and in turn that could be metamorphosed to the level of an icon. The government takes such a move in conserving the memory for the sake of the nation, which reminds one of the observation made by Anthony D. Smith that, "... it is indeed the memory ... rather than the experience of warfare that is important. Without memory ... there is no identity ... " (qtd.in Leoussi and Grosby 47). The government has also instituted a National Award in 1991 – Stree Shakti Puraskar – in the name of Rani Lakshmi Bai, to honour women who have exhibited extraordinary courage in their lives, which shows the high esteem in which the nation positions this historical personage. Installation of the effigies of the Rani across the country with the governmental support is yet another powerful point to illustrate that Rani Lakshmi Bai has been acknowledged as an icon of Indian nationalism.

Another step taken by the government to exhibit national prominence and deference attached to the historical queen is the conservation of the palace and fort of the Rani as tourist centres, maintained by the Uttar Pradesh State Government. Phool Bagh in Gwalior, the place where the Rani had attained martyrdom is well preserved and maintained by the Government as a tourist spot – an eloquent testimony to the deferential status the historical Rani enjoys in post-independent India. The conversion of the burial place of the Rani into a tourist centre creates an ineffable and invisible sense of unity among the people who visit the place. The memory that emanates from a martyr's monument is sufficient enough to implant the spirit of determination, dedication and patriotism which the martyr had sustained throughout his/her lifetime. An invisible cord of memories that connect the visitor to the martyr raises the spirit of nationalism in the mind of the visitor. This helps him

to shed his egoism and other differences that detach him from his fellow citizens. Thus it helps to create a moral community of the nation (Leoussi and Grosby 44). The same will be the effect upon the visitor who visits the martyr's column created in honour of Rani Lakshmi Bai in Gwalior. A visit to this place to offer a patriotic tribute inspires the people to embrace the spirit of patriotism, and thus acknowledge the Rani as an icon that supports in sustaining the spirit of nationalism. This recalls the observation that "The institutionalisation of commemorations around monuments to the dead, provides a central reference point for subsequent Nationalists" (Leoussi and Grosby 44). It has been reported recently in the newspapers that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his visit to Australia for bilateral talks, gifted to the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, the Australian solicitor John Lang's original petition of 1854 on behalf of Rani Lakshmi Bai against the East India Company (Kumar, *Times of India* 20 November 2014). Modi's utilisation of the name of Rani Lakshmi Bai and her association with the Australian lawyer during the second half of the nineteenth century to strengthen the affable ties between India and Australia, illustrates the national significance attached to the character and appellation of the Rani in the post-independence period. These efforts from the part of the Government of India in the post-independence period to attach national significance upon the character of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi staunchly establishes the fact that the nation as a whole officially approves her as an icon that sustains the spirit and essence of Indian nationalism.

When an image of a personality or a specific feature that pertains to the particularities of a nation is acclaimed as its icon, it should have the charismatic potential to attract the cohorts of all times, irrespective of spatial and temporal differences. While the image of the Rani serves as an icon of our nation and tradition, her character upholds the charisma to move beyond the boundaries of regional and temporal confines, and establish as an affirmative icon that appeals to the generations of all times.

Nationalism is a subject that needs to be researched and analysed from several angles, because it is interlinked with



various themes like history, politics, society, religion and relations. Hence nationalism can be distinguished as a phenomenon that encompasses multiple themes. This notion is applicable in every factor related to nationalism. As Radhakrishnan observes, “. . . nationalism is a contradictory discourse and its internal contradiction need to be unpacked in their historical specificity. The historical agency of nationalism has been sometimes hegemonic, although often merely dominant; sometimes emancipatory, although often repressive; sometimes progressive, although often traditional and reactionary” (190-91). Despite its pluralistic characteristics, it should cater to the essentials of all the subjects that come within the folds of nationalism. This is a significant concept that operates pertinently in the case of formulating and acknowledging an icon formed for the sake of a nation or for a nationalistic purpose.

## **The Rani: Iconized Heroine of all Ages**

Rani Lakshmi Bai has been the focus of resourceful artistic concepts for the writers and makers of history from the period of the Mutiny of 1857 till date. More than any other leader of the Mutiny, it is the Rani and her story that has been discussed, formatted, visualized, criticized, politicized and nationalized in this century. A serious scholastic contemplation into the life and history of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi helps to reveal the reasons that make her history so significant and appealing even in the contemporary scenario – where the way of life and thoughts are entirely modern and even mechanical when compared to the nineteenth century.

The name Rani Lakshmi Bai brings to the mind the equestrian image of a warrior queen with her infant son tied to her back and arduously combating against the invading forces. This ocular image conveyed through the resonance of the name Rani of Jhansi is capacious enough to bear and serve several substantial ideas and thoughts like motherliness, sense of guardianship (as the protector of her son and the nation alike), patriotism, independence, self-reliance, feminine gallantry, feminism, martyrdom, nationalism and above all the representation of a lady

with a modern outlook rooted in traditional ideas. It is not an easy phenomenon to incorporate such extremely dynamic images upon a single personality, and moreover to live up to meet the qualities of such powerful images too is an exceptional feat. Such actualizations play a significant role in transforming an individual from the level of a common layman to that of an exceptional prodigy, and transport him/her to another domain irrespective of the spatial, temporal and linguistic barriers. This explains the reason how the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai scaled the echelons of an icon that serves as a model for the forthcoming generations of a nation and also as a symbol that represents that nation as a whole before the world.

When the image of the Rani has the power to cross spatial, temporal and linguistic precincts, she could rightly be considered as the prototype of a new Indian woman that suits all the ages, whose inspiring history could be comprehended and followed as a stimulating paradigm by the women of the coming generations. The image of Rani Lakshmi Bai could be also decoded as an apt paradigm for a female hero, a comparison which brings this great nineteenth-century warrior queen within the category of a “virangana” (Jain and Mahan 283). The terms ‘new Indian woman’, ‘female hero’ and ‘virangana’ that qualify the image of the Rani are the *crème* of what has been expounded in the earlier sections. The monograph on the Rani could be concluded with an examination of the appropriateness and veracity of these terms or ideas placed on this historical queen.

According to the established Indian customs and standards, an Indian woman should be modest, bound to her family, religion, society, norms and traditions. At the same time, in the contemporary world, a woman in possession of merely these qualities could not survive. As suggested by the theory ‘survival of the fittest’ that is applicable for the contemporary competitive era, a woman of the modern age should be brave enough to withstand the tribulations that try to overpower her. She should have the capability to manage her family, and live and struggle in the competitive world. A woman who possesses the power of administration and efficiency to control society cannot be

accepted as a successful woman by the Indian society, unless she has the support of her traditions, values, and above all, her family. That is the established notion of Indian society, which is modern in outlook but traditional in its roots. The society accepts her as a successful and flourishing personality of the modern age only when she possesses the potential to win the outer worlds around her, keeping firm her foot inside her family and traditions. That is, she should be modern in her outlook but traditional in her roots. The quintessence of the idea is that Indian woman could be a campaigner and practitioner of Modernism, but it must be within the boundaries of the Indian tradition without the intercession of Western elements. When examined on this basis, the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai could well be brought into the category of a successful Indian woman who could be classified as a personality that suits to the modern age.

The Government of India instituted a *Stree Shakti Puraskar* in 1991 to acknowledge and appreciate commendable contributions of women to the society. This award is given in six categories and one of these is named after Rani Lakshmi Bai. Rani Lakshmi Bai award is meant for an Indian woman who exhibits exemplary courage in various circumstances of their lives. This is an outstanding instance that underlines the fact that, though the Rani lived in the nineteenth century, her actions, thoughts and courage befits to a woman of the present century. It is to inspire the women of this century, and to acknowledge the valorous and unyielding life and characteristics of the Rani that this *Stree Shakti Award* is named after her. Thus it is well approved by the modern Indian society that the life of the nineteenth-century queen has significance even in the twenty-first century, where the way of life has been re-organized and transformed to be merely mechanical and more intricate compared to the simplicity of the nineteenth-century life.

The idea of a female hero goes well with the image of the Rani as she had exhibited manly courage and indignation in fighting the invaders. The female hero image is similar to the image of the *virangana*, where the normally accepted qualities of masculine power, aptitude, authority and heroism gets attributed

to a feminine image, resulting with the measures, procedures and actions illustrated in the public domain for the welfare of the state and society by that female figure. The virangana image has been defined by Kathryn Hansen thus:

This female figure refuses to fit the polarities encompassed by the pairs good woman/bad woman, Chaste/unchaste, self-denying/all-destroying. Nor is she defined by her relationship to a male, and for strong, powerful and prudent, physically adept and wise. Rather than reversing any one particular role which may be viewed as dominant, the *virangana* moves beyond the roles for women prescribed by patriarchal society. She transcends and subverts the categories which ordinarily divorce power, strength, and independence in women from goodness, charity, and nurturance of others. (Thorner and Krishnaraj 283)

A perusal of the Rani history illustrates the fact that the Rani could be hailed as a virangana or a female hero as explicated above. The earlier chapters in this monograph have explicated the Rani's efficient administration, diplomatic decisions, amazing warriorship and the heroic martyrdom – the qualities which are usually associated with a male hero. Since these normally accepted masculine qualities get associated with Rani Lakshmi Bai, she undoubtedly serves as the model of a female hero or a virangana, and provides a message and inspiration for the society that women are not fragile and insubstantial, but are strong willed and capable enough to bring about enormous and affirmative changes in society. Our nation has accepted the image of Rani Lakshmi Bai as a virangana, and it has been rightly commented about the motive in publicizing and nationalizing the virangana imagery thus: “The entire exercise is designed to explore the creative potential of the *virangana* imagery which appears to provide a unique vision that combines traditional cultural authenticity with women's modern search for autonomy and independence” (Jain and Mahan 257). The image of *virangana* embodies a resolute female fighter who emerges as triumphant in the battle, but she is considered the champion of the Good over the Evil forces (Jain and Mahan 259).

An assessment of the life of the Rani reveals the fact that, as an individual, the Rani is a loser of everything. But the perseverance, audacity and robust optimism that she had exhibited throughout her life is praiseworthy, and is also rarely to be found among the common people of her age who had faced several losses in their lives within a short span of time. The Rani had lost her mother in her childhood, her childhood joys with her marriage to the Raja of Jhansi, her maiden name after her wedding, her son in his fourth month, her husband in her youth, her kingdom with the policy of annexation and at last her life at a very early age and that too without winning her battle against the British. As an individual, the Rani gained nothing, but succeeded in setting a historic example for the future generations on how should an individual behave when confronted and surrounded with problems in his/her own lives—fight till the end without yielding. The *Time Magazine* has included the name of the Rani in the list of Top Ten Daredevil Wives in the year 2011, taking into account her noble struggles against the injustice done to her dead husband by the colonizers, and her strain to achieve righteousness. The magazine has reported about the Rani thus: “Her legend lives on in statues and Indian school books to this day, it said about her valiant struggle” (Rani Lakshmi Bai in *Time’s List of Daredevil Wives* <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Rani-Lakshmibai-in-Times-list-of-daredevil-wives/articleshow/9338227.cms>>).

While the world appreciates the warriorship and bravery of the Rani, it seems pertinent to point out a fact that has rarely been notified in the history or biography of the Rani that there is a women’s wing of a regional political party based in Maharashtra which has its stand against the ferocious power exhibited by the Rani. According to this group, they are reluctant to place the Rani as the icon of their organization, as she was extremely aggressive and her brashness goes beyond the accepted limits stipulated by their principles (Loomba and Lukose 88). This is merely an isolated opinion proposed by a group against the majority that had praised the courage of the Rani to challenge a masculine super power which had overpowered their lives.

A perusal of the history of the Rani reveals the fact that, though she lived in the nineteenth century she was a woman with a progressive outlook, founded in traditional norms. According to the customs of the orthodox Hindu society, a widow should undergo tonsure soon after her husband passes away. The history testifies to the fact the Rani did not undergo a tonsure due to certain practical impediments of the time, but as a strict follower of traditions and customs, she paid penance to this flaw by feeding the Brahmins and offering water to the holy tulsi plant in the early hours of dawn. Similar is the case with her observance of the purdah system, which was strictly followed by the women of higher classes. The Rani did not maintain purdah system or never instructed this as a strict rule in Jhansi. The history confirms the fact that she wished to see her people and listen to their problems personally to find a solution for that. Purdah was a hindrance for her to create a personal attachment with her subjects. This reveals the modern social outlook of the Rani, though she was a queen who lived in an era, which had not even dreamt of modernism or socialism. At the same time, she strictly maintained purdah in front of the English officers, while discussing official matters. This shows her conservative terms along with the socialistic outlook this image suits the image of the woman of the modern era with a veiled implication that a modern outlook should be limited within the boundaries of tradition for its smooth functioning. The Rani's idea of organizing a women's band of the army named Durgavahini and training them militarily, to prepare them physically and mentally to utilize martial tactics and wield weapons for defending their nation and themselves against the invaders reveal the forward thinking of the Rani regarding her subjects. Such an avant-garde idea from a widowed nineteenth-century Hindu queen shows her developmental designs for the welfare of her nation and her subjects. It is noteworthy and this implies that the social and political perspectives that the Rani had adopted in the nineteenth century could be made use of as a point of reference even in this modern era. The Rani's affirmative attitude and uniform treatment of the soldiers in her army, irrespective of their caste, class or rank, illustrates her socialist ideology. The historical narrations of the Rani's association with

Jhalkari Bai, a dalit female soldier in her women's army is a fine example that could be noted here as an example of her egalitarian perspective. This demonstrates that the ideas of socialist ideologies of diplomacy and socialism, which we practice in the modern progressive era were inherent in this nineteenth-century queen.

Life of the Rani itself could be read as a reference book to adopt strategies to create and maintain a modern political, administrative and social climate for the welfare of the nation. The Rani, who lost her husband, child, palace, power and her nation, could have led a forlorn life inside the inner quarters with the pension given to her by the British, but she emerged as a ferocious fighter against the British, who had shown injustice to her dead husband, and fought till she attained martyrdom. Thus through her life, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi proved that she is a woman with progressive mentality, developmental designs, social commitments, political schematics and above all acted as an immaculate symbol and a strident message for the women of all ages.

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