



**The Role of Women Leadership in India's Politics and Government:  
A Factual and Fictional Analysis of 'The Last Queen' by Chitra  
Banerjee**

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**Abstract**

In the modern time, women in India were given freedom of expression and equality as well as right to be educated. They were enjoying the 'Ladies first' facility in different fields as they were holding numerous prestigious positions during this era. A strong woman is not born down by adversity, she knows how to turn her pain into her greatest strength woman makes a stupendous personal sacrifices, woman is a Icon of Liberation. A woman is a pearl of great prize. The book of "last Queen" is the tale of woman told by a woman enlivens the vastly unknown story of Jindan by intriguingly blending fact and fiction into an unputdownable novel. The last Queen portrays a simple village girls and her transition to the last queen of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is a timeless tale of a lady, which excites the reader with a spirit of patriotism and bravery. Divakaruni blends in Jindan the attributes of a girl-next-door and an magnanimous queen who is rooted, intelligent, who bows to no external force, but have passionate love for Punjab.

**Keywords:** Courage, freedom, resistance, leadership, Queen, society, techniques, women

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**Status of Women in the Medieval Period:**

The medieval period (between 500 A.D and 1500 A.D) proved to be highly disappointing for the Indian women, for this status further deteriorated during this period. The status of women reduced to the status of slaves. There was a vest gat between the status of woman in the early Vedic period and that in the medieval period and onwards.

Social reformers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had provided leadership to the women's movement by frankly acknowledging their degraded position in Hindu society. During the modern period of time, there was a study development in the status. There were many women reformers in India, who worked for upliftment and betterment of their female counterparts. Women education was elevated and English was introduced during this period various female writers emerged in the society.

In the modern time, women in India were given freedom of expression and equality as well as right to be educated. As a result, many women held prestigious positions during this time, and enjoyed the 'Ladies first' treatment across a wide array of fields. The Feminism has developed

from the contemporary writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitta Benejee Divakarini, Jhimpa Lahili etc.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the greatest story tellers in the contemporary scenario of English novelists. She has used different narrative techniques in her writings, there are the unique blend of techniques. The role of women leadership in India's politics and Government in fact and fiction with the special insight to the last Queen of Chitra Banerjee. It is a novel of courage and resistance. It is a novel of fierce queen overlooked by the history books. Last queen, not just Queen but last queen of sikh empire, and mother of khalia Rani Jindan Kaur. Story starts with describing her humble background, how she meets Ranjit Singh and he falls for her, how she understands of the geo-political situation, her husband, deteriorating health plunges the empire closer and closer to the brink of war, surrounded by Jackals who plans to plunder. It is a journey of a royal kennel keeper's daughter becoming the youngest queen of a prosperous state. It is a story of how in a male dominated society a woman in veil battles to hold her feet and becomes the mother of the khaha army. The last queen is a story of wife, sister, queen and mother.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's latest novel *The Last Queen* is a wonderfully mesmerizing account of the last queen of Punjab, Rani Jindan. She was Maharajah Ranjit Singh's youngest wife and mother of Maharajah Dalip Singh, who was later close to Queen Victoria. She was also grandmother to Sophia Dalip Singh, a prominent suffragette. Given who she was and the power that she held, surprisingly little is known about the queen, except in stray references and of course the magnificently regal portrait of hers by George Richmond (1863). In fact, Chitra Divakaruni loved the painting so much that it has been used as the cover image to her novel. So, it is remarkable how much research and effort she had to put in to create this literary portrait of Rani Jindan and make her come alive. In terms of her oeuvre, I find that the author gets better and better with every passing book especially in creating women's conversations. It could range from the conversations between the maids, hurling of insults, jealousies, love and affection etc. Chitra Divakaruni is astonishingly skilled at rescuing women from history and creating their point of view.

### **An Unforgettable Story of fearless much feared Queen. 'The Last Queen'**

The novel brings to life the youngest queen of the greatest of Sikh ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Daughter of kennel keeper, Jindan Kaur because a member of the royalty, gave birth to the King's heir, found love again after she was widowed at 21 and valiantly fought the British. Not many people know the heroic, awe-inspiring story of Rani Jindan Kaur, the youngest queen of the greatest Sikh ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, bestselling author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's latest book. *The Last Queen* (Harper Collins India, 2021) is the subject of Jindan's captivating story. The novel, which has already been optioned for film rights, is told in Jindan's first person, and is divided into four sections that chronicle the most important phases of her life in detail. Girl (1826-1834), Bride (1835-1839), Queen (1840-1849) and Rebel (1860-1863).

Jindan confident and adamant to make things happen, if she believes that she wants something. "How else could she, a girl from a no-name family on the outskirts of a small town, end up in Lahore, city of emperors? A haveli carved out of centuries of history in the heart of this fortress is not a common possession. If she did not train dogs, how was she able to become Sarkar's favorite queen? If she did not give him a son to delight him in his old age,

how else could she give him what many of his wives were unable to give him when they were married to him during his prime?

Jindan's childhood is present in a village hut on the muddy edge of Gujranwala. As a feisty nine-year-old, Jindan joins her older brother, Jawahar, in his exploits of stealing fruit from nearby orchards and fights with boys. Her mother allows her to study, unlike other girls, and she is a great student. However, after an abrupt end of her education, her father, Manna Singh Aulakh, who works and lives in the Badshahi Qila, takes Jindan and her brother to Lahore, "a magical city filled with riches".

The attention to Jindan's personal relationships, whether with her brother Jawahar, her husband, son, a favourite fellow-queen Guddan, or even her personal maid Mangla, brings in a much-needed emotional angle, one that could have been lost in a tale of valour and bloodshed.

Most importantly, the novel gives Jindan a sense of agency – for the most part, she is the master of her own decisions. As a young teen, she wants to marry Ranjit Singh not because her father plans to give her away with promises of her beauty but because she has fallen in love. "I want the Sarkar to like me, but not in the way Manna wishes," she maintains.

Years later, after the widow Jindan takes over as regent, she finds a lover in Lal Singh, a nobleman at court. Although it comes after much emotional turmoil, she is the one to make the first move, from the first outstretched arm to the first kiss. "Something wild inside me makes me throw back my veil and look into Lal's eyes. This is the first time I've knowingly enticed a man." It is her choices, her mistakes and decisions which she takes full responsibility for, that make Jindan the fearless, strong woman she is.

### **Driven by action**

Compared to Banerjee Divakaruni's past books *The Forest of Enchantments* and *The Palace of Illusions*, centred on the mythological figures of Sita and Draupadi, respectively, this one is a much lighter and quicker read, one that can be consumed in a single sitting. Action drives the story, and the writing is more fast-paced and casual as opposed to the formal, descriptive narratives that characterised her previous works.

While the first three parts – "Girl", "Bride", and "Queen" – of the four-part novel play out in exquisite detail, it makes the last few chapters of "Rebel" that cover her years as an exiled ruler in Nepal and later in Britain reunited with her son, seem like more of a longish epilogue due to their short length. This somehow makes the ending seem a bit rushed, leaving the reader wanting more. The small grouse aside, the author's mastery with words and her gift of weaving in fictional moments while staying true to the original premise – or history, in this case – continues to shine through.

The book recreates a timeless era gone by with vivid imagery and detailed descriptions, bringing it to life in the reader's mind. From her father, young Jindan has grown up hearing several stories of the king and the palace: "The Fair skinned dancing girls from the hills of Kashmir who perform all night for him in the Red Pavilion; his ghorcharhas a cavalry made up of the bravest young men in all of Punjab, unbeaten in battle; kennels full of the fiercest hunting dogs; enclosures for the royal elephants; and stable upon stable of pedigreed horses, culled from several countries." She longs to experience all these magical things herself.

While her father is tending to his horses, she meets the charismatic Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the palace. Ranjit Singh, known popularly as the Lion of Punjab, takes her riding on his special horse, Laila, and to a banquet afterwards. Ranjit Singh falls in love with Jindan. “The Sarkar laughs, ‘she doesn’t like that! Here, I’ll hold you. You won’t fall’”. His arm comes around my waist. My heart lurches, my face grows hot. I’ve never been so close to a man, and certainly never one so important. My braid unravels and the wind blows my hair into his face. I apologize and try to tie it up, but he says, ‘I don’t mind. Just enjoy the ride. Move your body like I’m moving, in time with the horse.’

He tells her stories of war and other adventures, and he is impressed by Jindan's beauty, as well as her bravery, curiosity, and intelligence. Even though all his other queens are of royal birth, he finds that the spirited Jindan understands him and loves Punjab as fiercely as he does. In no time, they are in love and get married. Jindan is soon adored by the king and is showered with gifts. A haveli named after the queen is given to her when her son Dalip is born.

Although the king died, Lahore saw several kings and many battles afterward. During this time, Jindan and her son were exiled in Jammu. Leaving the throne to Dalip is the fate that pushes the king's heirs to their deaths. Jindan becomes the queen regent until Dalip reaches adulthood so that he may become the king. In her new role, she fights hard against the British as well as her own treacherous courtiers. Amidst the prose are many politics, plots, spying games, tricks and endless battles for power that mark royal life.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni a renowned Indian American author regarding her new novel, *The Last Queen*, published on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021, makes her foray into historical fiction writing with her intrinsic writing style and character portrayal. The author got intensely touched after reading a short section that describes the fearless queen and how she fought with an invincible spirit after her imprisonment when she was separated from dear son and losing her wealth and money, she said that as readers, we could relate with the strong character of Rani Jinda, who is charismatic and relevant today also. As readers, we can connect with this stunning character and learn many things from her. The gripping episodes revolving around the female protagonist how she escapes from the prison and manages to meet her doting son will maze the readers. And what Rani Jindan chose to do at the end of her life and her relentless struggle till she breathed her last will inspire the readers. Having gotten adequate information about this remarkable queen of earthly beauty and indomitable strength, a contemporary icon for us, the author wrote that readers would get an understanding of her character, courage, grit, and integrity.

When women assume roles of leadership, they bring not only their own life experiences, perspectives, networks and training but a unique set of strength that can benefit politics in all sorts. In a study by the Hay group, women are found to consistently score better than men in the highly valuable areas of adaptability teamwork and conflict management.

In the face of gender based challenges we women should “proudly claim our space under sun” and continue to be themselves, to continue to teach proud of being woman leaders of our styles of management and our approaches to handling problems and crises.

During the pandemic, women outplayed men when it came to serving the covid-19 hit people. A survey showed that they were far more responsive and decisive than men. Globally women

have been applauded for handling this health crisis more efficiently and effectively. Women comprised the majority of the frontline healthcare workers in almost all countries, including India.

### **Conclusion**

The biggest compliment I can give to the women is that they are real difference makers. A woman can always turn pain to power. A strong woman is not born down by adversity, she knows how to turn her pain into her greatest strength woman makes a stupendous personal sacrifices, woman is a Icon of Liberation. A woman is a pearl of great prize. The book of “last Queen” is the tale of woman told by a woman enlivens the vastly unknown story of Jindan by intriguingly blending fact and fiction into an unputdownable novel. The last Queen portrays a simple village girls and her transition to the last queen of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is a timeless tale of a lady that excites the reader with a spirit of patriotism and bravery. Divakaruni blends in Jindan the attributes of a girl-next-door and an magnanimous queen who is rooted, intelligent, who bows to no external force, but have passionate love for Punjab.

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