



Raj

Gita Mehta

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Jaya Singh is the intelligent, beautiful, and compassionate daughter of the Maharajah and Maharani of Balmer. Raised in the thousand-year-old tradition of purdah, a strict regime of seclusion, silence, and submission, Jaya is ill-prepared to assume the role of Regent Maharani of Sirpur upon the death of her decadent, Westernized husband. But Jaya bravely fulfills her duty and soon finds herself thrust into the center of a roiling political battle in which the future of the kingdom is at stake... and her own future as well.

Raj Details

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Elena Sala says

RAJ is a novel about colonialism, a saga of the British Raj in India. It covers half a century of British-Indian history using a great deal of factual information.

One of its most important aspects is the relationship that existed between royal India and the Raj. In the novel, feudal India has been laid bare in its anxiety to hold onto a power not on its own strength, but pleasing the British. The complex and painful situation of the Indian rulers became more and more traumatic with the increasing interference of the British in their affairs. In a very subtle way Mehta depicts the growing tension and mutual suspicion between the British and the Indian ruling class.

The story is told through the life of Jaya, Princess of Balmer, a Princely state in Rajasthan who was born to this world of uncertainty and profound change. Her father, a forward looking King, brought her up in the modern way because he thought that the zenana tradition was becoming completely irrelevant in the changing times. Jaya received, then, a proper education in all aspects of statecraft and this will enable her to become an active participant in the ongoing process of the history of her people.

There are at least four histories in this novel: of British India, of feudal India, of India's nationalist struggle and of Jaya's own personal history, often intersecting or moving in parallel with each other.

RAJ is an engrossing novel which deals with the Raj neither with nostalgia nor bitterness. The life in royal India is captured in rich detail as well as the tense human relations in a colonial society. I warmly recommend this novel to all readers interested in colonialism, the history of India and feminism.

Patty says

A novel about Jaya, born at the very end of the 1800s as the princess of an (imaginary) independent Rajput kingdom, who marries the king of another (imaginary) independent kingdom, this one near Bengal. It's a novel about the Indian independence movement, but nearly everything I've previously read (both fiction and non-fiction) about it has focused on British India, so it's really interesting to see a perspective from the Princely States. There's a lot also about changing gender customs (both Jaya's mother and several other important women in her life live in purdah, while she herself doesn't). Unfortunately, the characters aren't nearly as good as the setting, but it's still a worthwhile book.

Sha says

Walaupun buku ini merupakan sebuah cerita fiksi, tapi menggambarkan latar belakang sejarah yang sangat akurat. Menggambarkan ketika inggris masih bercokol di daratan India. Hingga sampai akhirnya India (dan pakistan) berada pada ujung kemerdekaannya. Dibumbui dengan cerita pertautan hati antara sang Maharani dengan sahabatnya sejak kecil, sayangnya perbedaan ras (yang satu ningrat india, sementara yang lain adalah pejabat Inggris) menghalangi mereka. Perjalanan Maharani dari sejak kecil, kemudian kehilangan kakaknya, ibu dan ayah, hingga akhirnya ditinggal suaminya sangat menarik disimak. Karena setiap momen dibubuhi latar belakang sejarah yang kuat. Sehingga anda tidak hanya mendapatkan cerita fiksi, tapi juga pelajaran sejarah pada saat yang sama. :)

Sarah Wagner says

This novel chronicles the life of Jaya, an Indian princess traditionally raised in a time of change and upheaval. Jaya is born in the 1890s, when British rule in India is well-established, and during her lifetime, Jaya sees this authority challenged and crumble. Jaya tests her own strength, as she experiences a loveless marriage and the struggles of motherhood, but also when she becomes the regent of an Indian kingdom after her husband's death. Raj is an interesting portrait of Indian royalty during the struggle for independence and the collapse of the British empire.

Tamiko says

the ending felt a little rushed but overall a good book

Lawrence Snouffer says

A vivid confirmation of the depravity of human nature. Well written; sometimes compelling. India seems a land of millennia of multiple, contemporaneous and often overlapping upheavals, wars, injustices and violence at all levels of society. The reader is unable to relate well to any of the characters. The author uses an abundance of indian words, not all of which were in my unabridged dictionary, and the precise meanings of which were not always easily inferred from the context, and I felt a small glossary would have been helpful. A map would also have been helpful as looking up place names on google often proved inexact, confusing, or fruitless.

B. Hache says

Interesantísima novela histórica que nos arrastra a la situación de la mujer en la India del S.XIX hasta principios del S.XX. En Occidente hacen falta estas novelas para que podamos ver más allá de nuestras narices y de paso, podamos comprobar cual ha sido la situación y la vida que han llevado estas mujeres. Hacía años que no leía novela histórica, incluso pensando que no podría engancharme otra vez y he errado. Recomendable 100% (siempre que te guste la histórica)

Pragya Bhatt says

I'm giving it 3 stars because of the quality of writing and the immense research that went into the book. It really did bring Royal and British India to life. However, I wish the main character had been a stronger woman. Throughout the story she kept on going from one man to another for advice. When there weren't any more men to go to she went to her mother, mother-in-law and even to an old female-sooth sayer! And when these women were unable to help her she went back to the British resident of her kingdom, who she knew had spies after her and who was sending detailed reports of her liason with some freedom fighter back to Delhi. When the princess was growing up the writer makes her out to be a princes who has great prospects and who will make a change. A royal princess who, despite being a woman, would become a leader of her

people, or at least who had it in her to do so. But as she grew up and got married, she just became a woman who looked to her husband for approval. Even going as far as to modify her clothes, eating habits, way of speaking for him. When her husband dies she starts to hope that the British Resident or the Gandhian freedom fighter will be around to support her. As a reader I felt the writer built up a story about a supposedly great woman, and then had her fall, only so that readers would think 'o what a surprise! wasn't expecting that!' But for me it was more like, ok, this woman acts and thinks like an idiot, why is the writer trying to make her deep and intellectual?

Sally Boots says

I needed an audio book to keep me busy during stupid tasks and chose this one because it was 16 hours long. *Raj* is about the life and times of Jaya, the daughter of the Maharaja of Balmer; it's a story that starts before her birth in the 19th century and ends late in her life in the post-partition 20th century. Jaya's personal story is heavily interspersed with exhaustive and luscious descriptions of palaces and landscapes, and awkwardly stuffed with historical information. Maybe it's a function of listening to a book rather than reading it, but I spaced out a lot during these non-plot moments. They were very long. Every now and then I'd notice what I was listening to and think, "Why, what a lovely description!" or "Interesting historical moment," and then space out again. The main character was pretty engaging but as the book slogged along it became less and less about Jaya and more and more about the history of India, delivered in an increasingly ham-handed way.

KOMET says

This novel reads as a chronicle, not only of Princess Jaya's life, but also of an India in transformation from the late 1800s up through the early years following Independence in 1947.

I enjoyed reading this book and found Princess Jaya to be a remarkable woman. She weathers a lot of trying experiences and shows herself to be resilient.

The only fault I found with the novel, however, was in the sequencing of historical events. For instance, some of what the author stated about the placing of some events during the First World War were not accurate. When I read a historical novel, I get a better appreciation for the novel when the historical events it describes are true and placed in the proper sequences. Perhaps for some other readers, that matters little. But for me, that took away from me giving this novel 5 stars.

Jane says

"RAJ" is a historical novel written to span the years between 1890 and 1970. I REALLY liked the history. The author did an excellent job of providing a lot of information in a succinct and interesting way. She also accurately wove cultural dynamics into the history - minimizing the obvious (Ghandi era) but filling in the gaps that history books leave void. For this reason, I would recommend the book. However, if you are looking for a good novel with a captivating plot and a believable female heroine, I'd skip this one.

Diane Cameron says

A dense, fascinating and wonderful book telling the story of the British Raj from the point of view of an Indian princess in one of the Royal Indian states. Moving from desert to northwestern frontier, and revealing a life spent both within zenana walls and in purdah, which then moves out to public political rule of an Indian kingdom before the fall of the Raj and the obliteration of the kingdoms at the time of partition.

If you want to hear an authentic and moving tale about the Raj and its ongoing effect on India without wading through a history of hundreds of years, this is the novel for you. Excellent.

Aparna Dubey says

The book provides a great introduction into the lives of the rich princely families during the advent of the British into their kingdoms as well as their lives when they visited/studied/represented the British outside India; their interactions with Queen Victoria, the slow but strong rise of the Gandhi followers from Bengal. At times, the flow of the book meanders into too many trivial details, taking it away from its powerful theme. It was interesting for me to research later, that Gita Mehta is the daughter of the late Biju Patnaik.

Becky says

This book would've been better if it were 200 pages shorter. Mehra does a good job describing Royal India and outlining the dissolution of both the Raj and the British rule, but man, does she get stuck in loops! Discussing Pratap's "long eyes," for example--what the heck are long eyes? And why does she need to remind the reader of the prince's long eyes every time she mentions him? Also favorites of hers: glass bangles breaking, "that Angrez boy," even when he's clearly no longer a boy, and Lady Modi's "darlings" while she agonizes over her stupid dogs.

Beyond that, I had a hard time liking the main character. Early on, the reader is sold the idea that Jaya is a strong, warrior-hearted woman, then Jaya spends the rest of the novel letting men run all over her, merely "flushing with rage" when they misbehave. Not until the very (and I do mean VERY) end does she show some moxie, and by then I had stopped caring.

Kristin Maillard says

Epic tale of the demise of the Maharajah's and their many, many kingdoms, and the British in India. I feel I have looked a bit deeper into a past that has always fascinated me. Lost a little respect for Winston Churchill if, in fact, his quotes are truly his. Great read. Looooong.
