

# **Royal Women in Indian English Fiction**

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by

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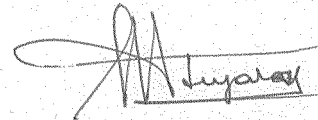
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **the thesis** entitled "Royal Women **in** Indian English Fiction" is **the bonafide record** of the original research work carried out by Ms. **R Jeyappriya under** my supervision and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any **degree**, diploma or fellowship.

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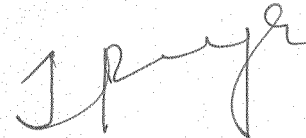
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## DECLARATION

I, P. Jeyappriya, declare that the thesis entitled "Royal Women in Indian English Fiction" is the bonafide record of the original research work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted earlier elsewhere for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship.

Place: Gandhigram

Date: 19.12.02



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Royalty has played a very important part in India's history. India has had kings and queens from time immemorial. Even when India became independent and the British colonisers left the subcontinent, India had to tackle hundreds of rajas and maharajas and persuade them to join the Indian Union. India has always been regarded universally as the land of rajas and ranis, princes and princesses.

So, quite naturally, many Indian writers have been drawn to royalty in their quest for fictional themes. There are many Indian. English novels, which portray real kings and queens from Indian history, and some others, which tell the Imaginary stories of royal personages of imaginary kingdoms, but with a high, degree of fidelity to the life patterns of real rulers. In all these creations and recreations, the focus is generally on the protagonist, who is invariably a male ruler. This is largely due to the fact that the novelist is interested predominantly in the reign of the protagonist and not in his private life. Perhaps another reason for this may be the fact that the royal women of India generally observed strict purdha and so there is hardly any record of their life and deeds.

Yet, there are several Indian English novels which recreate past ages of Indian history and portray royal women. They are, Vimala Raina's *Ambapali* (1962), A.S. Panchapakesa Ayyar's *The Legions Thunder Past*

(1947), *Baladitya: A Historical Romance of Ancient India* (1930), Shehana Dasgupta's *Razia: The People's Queen* (2001), Jyoti Jafa's *Nurjahan: A Historical Novel* (1978), T.N. Murari's *Taj: A Story of Mughal India* (1985), G.D. Khosla's *The Last Mughal* (1986), Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* (1976), S. Gopalan's *Old Tanjore: An Historical Novel* (1938), Manorama Ramakrishna Modak's *Single Is the Wheel* (1978) and Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind: Nana Saheb's Story* (1972).

Rama's *Ambapali* tells the story of the famous dancer of Vaishali. Her beauty charms one and all. It distracts the princes of the Lichchavi Confederation from their duties on the battle front against Magadh and puts the destiny of the Lichchavi Confederation in jeopardy. Hearing of her unparalleled beauty, *Samrat* Ajat Shatru of Magadh comes to Vaishali in disguise, loses his heart to her and marries her in the *gandharva* fashion. It is only when the next round of war with Magadh begins that *Ambapali* discovers that her husband and the father of the child she has conceived is none other than the hateful Magadh Monster. Ajat Shatru asks her to go to Magadh with him and reign as his queen. But she spurns the offer. Enraged, Ajat Shatru vows to destroy Vaishali and then carry her away as his prize. He vanquishes Vaishali and comes to claim her. But she confronts him with a shaven head and in saffron robes. To add to his discomfiture, his young son Vimal Kund, just a boy, accosts him as a Buddhist *bhikku* begging for alms to help the wounded and, when Ajat Shatru offers his crown, declines it.

Ayyar's short novel *The Legions Thunder Past* was originally part of his novel *Three Men of Destiny*, portraying Alexander, Chanakya and Chandragupta. As M.A. Jeyaraju, in his unpublished thesis, "Indo-Anglian Historical Fiction: A Critical Assessment," says, the novel was a failure because it could not portray the three giants from two cultures in a homogeneous narrative. In fact, *Three Men of Destiny* fell between two stools (72). So Ayyar later split it into *The Legions Thunder Past*, portraying Alexander, and *Chanakya and Chandragupta*, portraying Chandragupta and his mentor Chanakya.

In *The Legions Thunder Past*, Queen Kalavani of Asvaka, prompted by her love for her infant son and the evil counsel of Karala, the envoy of the King of Taxila, betrays her country after Alexander's soldiers kill her husband Asvajit. She surrenders to Alexander and orders her soldiers to cease resistance. Subsequently, she becomes the mistress of Alexander under the name of Kleophis. .

Ayyar's *Baladitya* tells the story of how Narasimha Baladitya, the descendant of the mighty Guptas and the dispossessed King of Magadha, assisted by his lifelong friend and vassal, King Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala, dislodges the Hun invaders and ascends his rightful throne at Pataliputra. But his marrying a commoner named Saraswati, instead of a kshatriya princess, drives a wedge between the two friends. So their original plan of driving the alien Huns out of Aryavarta remains a dream, particularly because Baladitya has become a pacifist Buddhist and

renounced all imperial **ambitions**. It is only twenty eight years later that **Yasodharman** mobilises a **confederation of** Hindu princes and drives the Huns out of **Bharatavarsha**. **Baladitya's wife**, Empress **Saraswati**, **Yasodharman's wife**, Queen **Charamati** and **Yasodharman's mother Maharani Mahamaya** play important roles in healing the rift between the estranged friends and persuading them to revive their original endeavour of ridding **Aryavarta** of the alien Huns.

**Dasgupta's short and poorly executed novel *Razia*** tells the story of the **only queen to rule from Delhi** in her own right. **Sultan Razia** was **purposely groomed for the throne by her father Sultan Iltutmish**, was **thwarted by the powerful Amirs from ascending the throne**, waited patiently, **struck at the appropriate moment**, got rid of her **scheming stepmother** and ascended the throne. She ruled **prudently and benevolently for about four years**. But the **scheming Amirs dethroned her through their intrigues** and she died while **trying to recapture the throne**. The novel is based on **Jamila Brijbushan's biographical-historical work *Sultan Razia: Her Life and Times***.

**Jafa's *Nurjahan*** tells the story of **Mehrannisa, the power-hungry wife of Jehangir**, her love affair with **Prince Salim**, the **planned murder of her husband Sher Afghan**, the **virtual imprisonment of the widow in the Mughal palace**, the ways in which she was persuaded to marry **Emperor Jehangir**, and how, after marrying **Jehangir** and being renamed **Nur Jahan**, she set about consolidating her hold over the **Emperor and the Empire**, particularly **keeping Prince Khurram as far away from the Court for as long as possible**

and creating an open rift between **him** and the Emperor, so as **to** prevent **Khurram** from succeeding Jehangir. The novel also narrates how, when General **Mahabat** Khan made Emperor Jehangir a **prisoner in** Ms own camp, **Nuijahan**, with a combination of courage and cunning, liberated him.

**Murari's *Taj*** tells the **story of** two royal women, **Mehrumssa** and **Arjumand**. **Mehrunissa, the widow, becomes the last queen of Emperor Jahangir and the virtual ruler of Hindustan. She schemes resolutely to deny the Mughal throne to the Crown Prince, Shah Jahan, and enthrone, in his stead, her own good-for-nothing son-in-law Shahriya. But her niece Arjumand, who is the wife of Shah Jahan, counsels him correctly on how to tackle her aunt's machinations. Ultimately, Shah Jahan becomes the Emperor. But, his rejection of one piece of advice by Arjumand, namely that he spare the lives of his brothers, costs him dearly. His own sons rise against him. Aurangzeb mercilessly murders Shah Jahan's favourite son Dara, imprisons his father, and ascends the throne.**

**Khosla's novel *The Last Mughal* tells the tale of Prince Abu Zafar's struggle to ascend the Mughal throne after Ms father Emperor Akbar the Second, who himself seeks to frustrate his eldest son's rightful claim because of the selfish counsel of Ms favourite queen, Ms mother and Ms paternal aunt. The second part of the novel presents how the same Abu Zafar, upon becoming Emperor, gives in to the selfish counsel of his favourite queen Zeenat Mahal and seeks to thwart the rightful claim of Ms Crown Prince and to instal in his stead, Prince Jawan Bakht, the son of**

**Zeenat Mahal.**

Gidwani's novel *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* tells the story of Hyder Ali Khan and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Fakhr-un-Nissa, wife of Flyder, is a great influence on him in matters germane to the destiny of Mysore. It is she who is responsible for Hyder's son Tipu being brought up in a particular manner which moulded his character and personality in a particular fashion and, consequently, affected his destiny and Mysore's. Tipu's wife Ruqayya Bami exercises a significant influence on Tipu's decisions and actions.

Gopalan's *Old Tanjore* tells the story of the Palace intrigues round the lawful succession of Serfojee to the throne of his adoptive father Maharajah Tuljajee. The Dowager Maharani, Tuljajee's mother, who was the power behind the throne before she became blind, plays an important role even after becoming blind. Two of the five queens of Tuljajee, Sujana Bai and Girja Bai, play an important role in safeguarding the person of Serfojee against the machinations of the usurper Amar Singh until he is placed on the throne.

Modak's *Single Is the Wheel* tells the story of the fall of the last Maratha kingdom. Two of the several queens of the ruler, Shrimant, play significant roles in the story. His dead mother's role is quite significant, because his tragedy is traced to her treachery.

Malgonkar's novel *The Devil's Wind* tells the story of the Indian Revolt of 1857. It sets out to re-read history so as to tell the story of the Indian uprising from the Indian point of view, particularly from the point of view

of Nana Saheb, the principal figure in the Kanpur theatre of the uprising, who was maliciously maligned by British imperialists as the butcher of Kanpur. Champa, Nana Saheb's first concubine, Azijan, his second one and Kashi, his wife, with whom he never consummates his marriage, play important roles in his life and in the course of events. Hazrat Mahal, the ousted queen of Oudh and Zeenat Mahal, the vengeful queen of Emperor Bahadur Shah, are also presented in the novel.

Most of these historical novels recreate past ages and portray real historical personages, that is, monarchs, as protagonists. At least some historical or legendary evidence is available to the novelist to recreate the reign of these monarchs and portray their personality. But there is hardly any evidence of the role and the influence of the royal women in their lives, except in the case of Nuqahan. So, recreating the role played by the royal women who were associated with the royal protagonists must have certainly been a challenging task to the novelists. They have exercised keen historical imagination in attributing words and deeds to the royal women in consonance with historical records, the prevailing milieu and the personality of the historically documented figures. The present study proposes to examine how these novelists have done it.

Avrom Fleishman, in *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, says that the historical novelist, as "a recoverer of what actually happened," occupies the same ground as the historian (4). In *The Idea of History*, R.G. Collingwood explicates the resemblance between the

historian and the novelist thus:

Each of them makes it his business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole, where every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act in this way, and we cannot imagine him as acting otherwise. The novel and the history must both of them make sense; nothing is admissible in either except what is necessary, and the judge of this necessity is in both cases the imagination. Both the novel and the history are self-explanatory, self-justifying, the product of an autonomous or self-authorizing activity; and in both cases this activity is the *a priori* imagination.

**(245-46)**

Collingwood goes on to point out where the historian's work and the novelist's differ:

Where they do differ is that the historian's picture is meant to be true. The novelist has a single task only: to construct a coherent picture, one that makes sense. The historian has a double task: he has both to do this, and to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened.... (*The Idea of History* 246)

Fleishman explicates this difference from the historical novelist's

artistic point of view:

Both the novelist and the historian;.. fill the gaps in the received data with imaginative 'threads'.... The historian tries to add sufficient 'points' so that only one 'thread' or hypothesis can fill the space between. The better historical novels fill in the threads where there is room for alternative hypotheses.... The novelist goes a bit farther than the inferentially necessary; some of the threads with which he fills the web of historical knowledge are inserted for the discrete data to be linked.... We might compare the historical novelist to the restorer of a damaged tapestry, who weaves in whole scenes or figures to fill the empty places which a more austere museum curator might leave bare \_\_ (6-7)

William Henry Hudson, in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, suggests that the historical novelist has to do more than the historian, because he has "to bring creative imagination to bear upon the dry facts of the annalist and the antiquarian, and... to evoke a picture having the fullness and unity of a work of art," since he has "to satisfy at once the claims of history and the claims of art" (159-61). To do this, the historical novelist requires a keen historical sense, which, as T.S. Eliot, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," says, "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence," and "is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together

Exercising keen historical sense and historical imagination, the authors of the novels analysed in the present study have recreated several royal women about whom history provides very little information. Particular mention must be made of the royal women who moulded the character and personality of the royal personages who figure in these novels, since history hardly ever concerns itself with the growth and adolescence of princes, but concentrates only on the public deeds of kings. In the case of many of the novels analysed in the present study, the authors maintain, by implication, that the public deeds of the royal personages portrayed could be largely attributed to the influence of the royal women around them, which is generally not recorded in history, but which these novelists have reconstructed imaginatively.

Since hardly any critical attention has so far been paid to the words and deeds of the royal women in these novels, the present study depends almost exclusively on textual evidence to analyse the fictional portrayal of these characters and to assess the extent to which these royal women influenced the character and the conduct of the monarchs and thereby the destinies of the nations which they ruled. The eleven novels have been arranged in the order of the chronology of the periods recreated in them. The names of several historical personages are spelt differently by different novelists. The present researcher has retained the spellings used by the respective authors.

This thesis is organised as hereunder. The introductory chapter states the role of royal women in historical novels, points to the role played by the

royal women in eleven Indian English historical novels and explains the difficulty involved in portraying royal women. The second chapter analyses the roles played by the royal women in the novels recreating ancient periods of Indian history, namely *Ambapali*, *The Legions Thunder Past* and *Baladitya*. The third chapter analyses the roles played by the royal women in novels recreating the history of Muslim India, namely *Razia*, *Nurjahan*, *Taj* and *The Last Mughal*. The fourth chapter analyses the roles played by the royal women in novels recreating British India, namely *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*, *Old Tanjore*, *Single Is the Wheel* and *The Devil's Wind*. The fifth chapter sums up the foregoing chapters and points to areas for further research suggested by this study. A list of works cited is appended to the thesis.

This thesis has been written and documented according to the guidelines provided by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, by Joseph Gibaldi, 4th edition (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West, 1996).

## Chapter 2

### Royal Women in Ancient India

Ancient Indian history is a rich mine of subjects for fiction. Raina's *Ambapali*, Ayyar's *The Legions Thunder Past* and Ayyar's *Baladitya* imaginatively recreate ancient India and its rulers. The royal women who figured in their lives played an important part in their lives and influenced their affairs significantly.

Ambapali, the famed dancer of Vaishali, may be regarded as the principal cause of the destruction of the oligarchy of the Lichchavi Confederation. It is for her that Ajat Shatru vows to destroy Vaishali, though, ultimately, she frustrates his goal of taking her to Magadh as his queen by joining Buddha's sangh. She is the only significant royal woman in Raina's *Ambapali*.

Ambapali is a foundling. Giribal, the *raj mali* or royal gardener, of Raja Chetak of Vaishali, finds her abandoned in the *amra van*, or mango grove in Ms charge. The widower Giribal has never had a child of his own and the foundling fills the void in Ms heart with warmth. Thanking God for this gift of the *van devi*, or forest goddess, he takes the baby to his hut. He makes his goat suckle the baby and she goes to sleep. He decides' to present the baby to Raja Chetak when he visits the royal temple near the garden and obtain his blessings and Ms permission to keep the child. Raja Chetak, upon hearing Giribal's tale, blesses the child and permits the *mali* to keep

the baby. He presents a necklace of pearls as a token of his blessing to the child. Upon learning that the baby has no name, Raja Chetak names her *Ambapali*, the gift of the mango grove (Raina, *Ambapali* 5-14).

Raja Chetak often asks Giribal about Ambapali. He prefers to receive flowers from Ambapali to offer to the gods in the temple. One day, burdened with state problems, he sends his courtiers off to the palace and goes into the garden. Seeing Ambapali jumping in vain to reach a champa flower, he plucks it and gives it to her. He tells her to be with him for a while because he is weary. She comes forward and, taking his first finger in her little grip, leads him on. Later she returns to show Giribal a string of pearls given by Raja Chetak and to tell him that she took him to their hut and gave him honey and also showed him *baki ma*, the goat that suckled her as an infant. Soon Giribal gets a newly built house near the palace lake, Ambapali's favourite haunt. His needs are all attended to. He is paid in gold and he becomes a rich man (Raina, *Ambapali* 59-62).

When Ambapali is eight years old, Raja Chetak requests the *raj guru*, or supreme priest, Acharya Deva Kashyap, who has come with him to the palace temple, to teach Ambapali and asks Ambapali to receive the *raj guru's* blessings. Ambapali kneels and bends her head at the *raj gum's* feet. Acharya Kashyap directs that Ambapali be sent to his *ashram*. He says that she will learn more than any books or letters can teach her (Raina, *Ambapali* 62).

Ambapali learns fast at the *ashram*. She has innumerable friends

among the inmates of the palace who shower presents on her. She has many friends of her own age on the way to the *ashram* and she takes food and toys to them. She tells them fairy stories. They too tell her stories. One day, going to the bazaar to buy some clothes and ornaments for Ambapali for *deepawali*, the festival of lights, Giribal meets Surya Mani, a Sakyan prince and one of Raja Chetak's nephews, who had been fond of him as a boy. Surya Mani, who has been away in Taxila studying, now visits Giribal often and becomes fond of Ambapali (Raina, *Ambapali* 63-80; 94).

Once, Bimbasar, the Magadh *Samrat*, waged war against Presenjit, the King of Kosala. Fearing defeat, Presenjit made an alliance with Bimbasar by offering him his daughter in marriage, along with a dowry of a hundred thousand, which was the total revenue of Kashi, for her bath and toilet expenses. When the Kosalan princess died shortly, Presenjit did not stop the revenue, fearing disturbing consequences. But, when Vidu Rath, Presenjit's son by a morganatic marriage, comes of age, he asks his father to stop this drain on the State revenue. Presenjit refuses to do so. Vidu Rath, who is the commander-in-chief of his father's army, boils with impotent rage. At last, losing all patience and, without obtaining his father's orders, he goes to Kashi with his army and refuses to pay the Magadhian king the yearly revenue. When Bimbasar hears of this he only wonders why Presenjit has not stopped the revenue earlier. But his son Ajat Shatru, who has been Viceroy of Champa for four years, protests that Presenjit has defied the sovereignty of Magadh. Bimbasar, however, is adamant. But, Ajat Shatru's

Minister and mentor Vasakar goads him to war. Ajat decides to attack Sravasti, the Kosalan capital, without the knowledge of Bimbisar (Raina, *Ambapali* 114-18).

When Presenjit learns that Ajat Shatru is advancing on his capital, he curses his son Vidu Rath as a traitor and decides to receive Ajat Shatru as a guest and make an alliance with him. When Ajat Shatru arrives, Presenjit offers him his daughter Vajira's hand in marriage, with the revenue of Kashi as dowry. Ajat Shatru accepts the offer. Ajat Shatru is led to Princess Vajira in style. As he enters her garden, Vajira welcomes him with a garland (Raina, *Ambapali* 127-29).

As Presenjit continues ranting against Vidu Rath, Rani Mallika, his most devoted wife, seeks audience with him. She is the only wife to whom he turns for solace and comfort. She is a devotee of Lord Buddha and lives a pious life. She is kind and benevolent and the people love her. Though she looks like his daughter, she treats him like a child. He raves, calling his physician and his son traitors and saying that everyone wants him to die (Raina, *Ambapali* 130-32). Rani Mallika comforts Presenjit thus:

“These are only fancies of a tired mind, my lord. We all love you. Look at me, your wife. Do I want you to die? I wish I could pour my own warm blood into your veins. You are more worthy than I. You have more to do. But why worry now, my king. By the grace of Lord Buddha, a foe has turned into a friend, a stranger into a son. It is an occasion to be happy, my lord. Vidu Rath is

your own son, sire, your flesh and blood. When he comes, give him charge of the burdens of the State. His shoulders are broad and strong and his arms are powerful. He **will** not bend under the weight and you shall be the king, his father, and enjoy **life** anew, with no strain, and no worries of the State. Medicines react poorly on a worried mind. After the wedding [**Vajira's**], come with me to the abode of Lord Buddha. We will travel through the green forests and a change of air and rest coupled with Lord Buddha's blessings will give you back all you want.. .." (Raina, *Ambapali* 133)

Presenjit is much comforted by her words and, in gratitude, says that, if she had a son, he would have proclaimed him his heir, to which she replies:

"You forget sire, my son could not ascend the royal throne, for I, his mother, am a commoner, a *mail's* daughter. Had he been bom, he would have been another Vidu Rath; for though he loves you, his father, he cannot forget that you brought him into the world through a slave girl. He, therefore, can never be the King of Kosala. The gods be praised that I bore no child for I cannot bear the thought that a son bom **of** me should have hated his mother because her birth denies him a kingdom. A throne, my lord, chums the blood to such poison, it toms mothers and fathers into mere obstacles that must be cut down to clear the way to the throne. Come no w, we have been spared this by the grace of the

gods....” (Raina, *Ambapali* 133)

Mallika urges that Vidu Rath is not Presenjit’s enemy, but has venom in him that incites him to take revenge against the Sakyans who have caused him his irrevocable misfortune. She assures him that Vidu Rath will calm down. She even suggests that the youngster may be allowed to go to war to have his vengeance. At this Presenjit raves again. Mallika soothes him by talking of the festivities of the morrow and the marriage of Vajira and Ajat Shatru. Mallika is not very optimistic about the effect of her words because Presenjit has a habit of backsliding. She knows very well that he does not really believe in Buddha, but still takes him to Lord Buddha because such visits please his subjects and his magnanimous gifts bring him respect and fame (Raina, *Ambapali* 134-35).

When Ambapali is fifteen years old, the Chinese traveller Than Swan Shaang and his friend Chou Yan come to Vaishali hearing of the splendour and magnificence of the spring festival. Vijaya Veera, who is the *Maha Senani*, or Chief Military Adviser, has been deputed to take the visitors round. They chance upon Ambapali playing with two swans in the lake and mistake her for a nymph. When she climbs out of the water and goes home carrying two vessels of water on her head, they follow her talking in whispers. Vijaya laughs at their whispering and says that she is not a fairy but little Ambapali. They ask if she is a princess. Vijaya Veera explains who she is (Raina, *Ambapali* 155-58).

Princess Ratnawali, one of Raja Chetak’s daughters, who is on a visit

to her father, has asked Ambapali to accompany her to the spring festival. Since she is to sit in the royal gallery, Giribal decides that she must go dressed like a princess. He buys gorgeous garments and a beautiful piece of jewellery for her head decor. He also wants her to wear the pieces of jewellery that Raja Chetak has given her over the years. They leave for the palace, an unknown vague feeling of fear dominating Giribal's mind (Raina, *Ambapali* 162-66).

The spring festival has not been celebrated by the State and the customary dance competition has not been held for some years because the ongoing war with Magadh at the frontier has kept the Lichchavi nobility busy and away from Vaishali. Now that Vijaya Veera, with his brilliant leadership, has turned the war in Vaishali's favour, the spring festival is being celebrated with buoyancy and cheer. In the auditorium, Kura Sundari, a competitor from Kurushetra, angers Surabhi and Ambapali by her insulting response to Princess Ratnawali's curiosity to know her name and by her condescending reference to the great dancer of Vaishali, the late Chandra Sena. Kura Sundari proceeds in her haughty manner to question the judges' competence to judge the dance of her land. At this, a ripple of laughter comes from the ladies' gallery and one of the senior judges cuts Kura Sundari to size by permitting her to choose any classical technique. Kura Sundari dances well and the audience applauds her. The applause goes to her head and she recklessly attempts a highly intricate *torn* and falters. Ambapali, who has been watching the dance with genuine

fascination, detects the fault and impulsively calls out aloud. Like a flash of lightning, her single word silences the auditorium. Kuru Sundari challenges her critic to come up to the stage and do the *tora* or apologise to her publicly. The judges and the President, Raja Chetak, will not flout the rules of the competition and so Ambapali is exposed as the impulsive critic. Princess Ratnawali pleads that Ambapali meant no challenge and that, being a child, she was not aware of the rules of the competition. Ambapali herself is contrite for the slip and is prepared to apologise. But her father Giribal shouts from deep in the audience against an apology. Kuru Sundari maliciously taunts Ambapali. Enraged at this, Raja Chetak rules out an apology and commands Ambapali to meet the challenge. The audience also clamours so (Raina, *Ambapali* 166; 170-78).

Blessed by Princess Ratnawali and encouraged by Surabhi, Ambapali goes up to the stage. The loud-mouthed Kuru Sundari taunts Ambapali still, but Surabhi silences her. The judges smile because they know Ambapali's mastery of all the forms of classical dancing thanks to the tutelage of the chief *guru maha sangeetagya* from Taxila. The *maha sangeetagya* withdraws from the judging committee because he has taught Ambapali the dance of the Kurus but he blesses his pupil before walking away. Ambapali opts to use Kuru Sundari's musicians rather than her own. Taking her cue from Kuru Sundari, Ambapali dances the *tora* to perfection. As she ceases, the audience applauds her and the *guru maha sangeetagya* proudly smiles at her and gestures to her to proceed with her dance. As Kuru Sundari

grinds her teeth in vicious jealousy, Ambapali beckons to her own musicians and begins to dance the classical dance of Vaishali (Raina, *Ambapali* 179-81).

When Ambapali gracefully ends her dance, the entire assembly applauds her ecstatically and demands that she be crowned *raj nartaki*. Ambapali is stunned and bewildered. Princess Ratnawali and Surabhi try to comfort her. As they lead her away, the judges tell the President, Raja Chetak, that, according to the custom of the dance competition, Ambapali deserves to be crowned *raj nartaki*. Raja Chetak agrees that Ambapali is the best dancer, but hesitates. However, he will not flout custom or the verdict of the judges and the people and so he announces that Ambapali is the winner of the title of *raj nartaki* of Vaishali. He garlands her and then she is carried by princes and gallants in a litter to the palace of the *raj nartaki* (Raina *Ambapali* 181-82).

Ambapali feels bewildered and restless. She misses and longs for the comforting presence of Surya Mani. After a night of restless slumber, she goes in search of Giribal early in the morning, even before her maids are awake. When they apologise to her for having overslept, she feels embarrassed. However, she gradually gets used to the servility of her maids, including Surabhi, just as she gets used to the attention and the compliments paid by the princes and the *shresties* of Vaishali (Raina, *Ambapali* 194-98).

However, before her one year as *raj nartaki* is over, Ambapali's innocence is gradually pushed away from her eyes by the passionate looks

of her valiant admirers, Ambapali intuitively feels and knows the meaning of the glances that linger on her. But the young men who court her mean nothing to her. She does not and cannot love those who teach her love's existence. On the contrary, she is afraid of them and their impetuosity (Raina, *Ambapali* 209).

Exasperated by Ambapali's evasive exclusiveness, her suitors pester Giribal for her hand in marriage. Frightened by the number of such suitors, Giribal advises Ambapali to retain the position of *raj nartaki* for one more year, hoping thereby to postpone a feud till she chooses her own man and goes away with him. Giribal is particularly pained to observe two cousins named Prince Anand Deva and Prince Soma Deva, who live like brothers, gradually drifting apart because of their rivalry for the favours of Ambapali. When Ambapali observes the drift between the two cousins, she becomes sad. She wishes that they were both like Prince Surya Mani. She even tells them so. She learns about the war with Magadh and about Ajat Shatru, the new *Samrat* of Magadh from Anand Deva and Soma Deva. Her initial reaction is to hate Ajat Shatru for his ambitious and evil designs against Vaishali, his reported cruelty to his own father and his unkindness to his brothers Halla and Bhalla, who have sought refuge with their grandfather Raja Chetak. However, Anand Deva explains to her the facts as he obtained them from Vijaya Veera and so Ambapali's dislike of the Magadh Monster Ajat Shatru is tempered to some extent (Raina, *Ambapali* 213-25).

Ajat Shatru attacks Vaishali and scores success. Vaishali loses ground

on the front. The news fills the people with fear and panic. Ambapali observes that several princes visit her from the front, even at odd hours. When she discovers from Prince Shiromani that they all leave the war in the charge of their *senapaties* and come to court her, she knows what she must do. Politely, but firmly, she asks Prince Shiromani to go back to his post. Just then Giribal ushers in a Sakyan prince who has met her before in the company of Surya Mani. Soon the Sakyan prince and Prince Shiromani exchange taunts and, drawing their swords, start fighting. As Ambapali watches helplessly and frightened, her maid Paragani fetches Giribal, who tries in vain to stop the fight. Prince Shiromani loses his sword and draws his dagger. As Giribal interposes himself between the two princes, the pouncing Shiromani's dagger pierces through Giribal's back. The dying Giribal seeks an audience with Raja Chetak. When Raja Chetak arrives, Giribal entrusts Ambapali to his care. After Raja Chetak says that Ambapali will be Ms child, Giribal dies (Raina, *Ambapali* 225-31).

Ajat Shatru wins the battle and the MagadMan camp erupts in jubilation. Ajat Shatru is filled with pride and satisfaction and his commander Abhaya Singh shares Ms king's enthusiasm. But Ajat Shatru's Mimster, Vasakar, sits deep in thought. Ajat Shatru impulsively announces to his soldiers that he will ask *Maha Matya* Vasakar to open the camp treasury to them as a reward for the victory that they have won for him (Raina, *Ambapali* 231-32). But Vasakar tells Ajat Shatru:

“They have won you no victory Prince. You have spoken in

emotion, sire. The camp treasury is meant for battle and not for booty. But your word must be respected. Emotion, sire, is wine in peace and poison in war. Its effect is never healthy. It dulls the spirit in the best of times and kills it in times of war. This is no victory won by you or them. It is a gift to you, sire, presented by the most beautiful woman of Vaishali.” (Raina, *Ambapali* 232)

Vasakar continues:

“It is her smile which has raised laughter in your men. It is the sweep of her eyebrow that has helped your men to brow-beat the Lichchavies. It is the dark wine of her eyes that makes your men drunk with joy. In short it is her beauty that has unfurled your flag on her soil!..(Raina, *Ambapali* 232)

Ajat Shatru thinks that Vasakar has become mad and that his mind has been turned fanciful because of the strain of war. Vasakar, however, explains to Ajat Shatru the cause of the Magadhian victory, as he has found out from his spies whom he sent to discover the cause of the uncertain progress of the Magadhians into the enemy lines:

“The cause was the most beautiful girl of Vaishali, the *raj nartaki*. The princes who commanded their armies were rivals. So great was their infatuation for her and so intense was their hatred and suspicion of each other that they put not their mind to win the battle—but to win the girl! They left their armies in charge [sic] of their *senapaties* and left for Vaishali every eve intending to

return before dawn. Those who did, were too exhausted in this heat after their long journey through the night; and those who overstayed beside her, neglected their duty. If they saw the army of one prince suffering a loss, they did not rush to help but stayed away so that he might be put to shame, or taken prisoner. An army without a general is a mob, not an army—and so—we broke through their lines. This and not our valour, Prince, won us our victory. Your flag unfurls there today in homage to her beauty!”  
(Raina, *Ambapali* 235)

Upon learning of Ambapali’s beauty, Ajat Shatru impulsively decides to go to Vaishali and see her. Vasakar cautions against such rashness and the danger of capture. But Ajat Shatru brushes his advice aside. Seeing Ajat Shatru’s stubborn determination, Vasakar gives in, but asserts that he must go with Ajat Shatru because he has much to do in Vaishali. He has learnt that the governing body of Vaishali is planning to reunite the princes and is to meet soon to arrive at a decision. He points out that Ajat Shatru has yet to fly the Magadhian banner atop Raja Chetak’s palace. Ajat Shatru says that he has not forgotten it. He asserts that he is immune to beauty, but must see Ambapali if she is all that Vasakar has described. He points out that since the rains have started, there must be a lull in the fighting. He proposes to go to Vaishali with Abhaya Singh and return in two days  
(Raina, *Ambapali* 235-36).

Vasakar proposes to send Ajat Shatru to Vaishali in disguise and

shadowed by Ms spies there. Ajat Shatru decides to go to Ambapali disguised as a Lichchavi merchant who has travelled for long over the high seas and returned with precious stones to sell her and to be accompanied by Abhaya Singh disguised as his slave. Ajat Shatru is greatly excited about the coming adventure, though he repeatedly asserts that a woman's beauty cannot affect him (Raina, *Ambapali* 236-37).

Ambapali takes quite some time to recover from the tragedy of Giribal's death. Finally, she decides to drive out in her chariot one evening. Ajat Shatru, disguised as the merchant named Ajit Singh and Abhaya Singh, disguised as his slave Bhilu, see her flashing past in her chariot and are charmed by her beauty. They go to Ambapali's palace. Abhaya Singh meets Anurag, the chief of her guards, who tells them to wait in the *vishram mandir*, the rest house. Ambapali returns to her palace. Ajat Shatru is impatient to meet her and awaits her call (Raina, *Ambapali* 238-43).

At last Ambapali favours Ajat Shatru with a meeting. For some time, Ajat Shatru remains spellbound and tongue-tied. When he does find his tongue again, he mouths Mgh-flown poetic praises of Ambapali rather than the virtues of Ms pearls and gems. Then he spins a convincing as well as pathetic yam of his richness and his treasures and his homelessness in his own native Vaishali. Ambapali is moved to recommend that he be accommodated for the night in the guest house. Ajat Shatru and Abhaya Singh take leave of Ambapali for the night (Raina, *Ambapali* 244-49).

Ajat Shatru originally planned to spend only two days in Vaishali.

However, even after a week, he refuses to leave, despite Vasakar's arguments, threats and pleas. Vasakar finally capitulates and arranges for Ajat Shatru to stay in the house of his spy Chitra Sena. Ajat Shatru is inextricably in love with Ambapali (Raina, *Ambapali* 249-53).

After a week, Ajat Shatru can no longer restrain his love for Ambapali and begs her to take him in for the night. He proposes to wait for the evening *samaj* to depart and then climb to her balcony by the creeper that hangs by her window. Ambapali agrees to wait for him. Ajat Shatru excitedly tells Abhaya Singh of the coming tryst with Ambapali. Abhaya Singh warns him of the latent dangers, but Ajat Shatru brushes them all aside (Raina, *Ambapali* 252-57).

That evening, Ajat Shatru and Abhaya Singh go to Ambapali's palace. They hide in the dark shade of the trees while the assembly of the *samaj* leave. Ambapali stands on the balcony alone. Bidding good-bye to Abhaya Singh, Ajat Shatru rushes towards Ambapali, who, seeing him, comes towards him. Soon Ambapali is enveloped in Ajat Shatru's arms (Raina, *Ambapali* 258-59).

Day after day, Ajat Shatru and Ambapali bask in each other's love. The secret of their meetings is shared by her chosen maids and Anurag, the chief of her guards, who are happy that their mistress has at last found love and happiness. Ajat Shatru has won them over with his generosity and his kindness. Surabhi has introduced Ajat Shatru to Vijaya Veera. Ajat Shatru now comes to Ambapali's circle as an accepted member. But he still does

not join the *samaj*. This is explained away by Ambapali's fear of princely jealousy like that which led to her father's death. Ajat Shatru is expected to settle down in Vaishali, win recognition for himself and then marry Ambapali publicly (Raina, *Ambapali* 259-64). Ajat Shatru is overjoyed when Ambapali tells him that she is pregnant and he wants to marry her immediately (Raina, *Ambapali* 266).

The governing body of the Lichchavi Confederacy institutes an inquiry into the conduct of the deserters who were responsible for losing the battle. It is found that, while many princes deserted their command, many more failed to help neighbouring armies deserted by their commanders. It is also found that rivalry for the favours of Ambapali was the cause of all this. It is imperative that the Lichchavies unite and counterattack the Magadhians. An old minister opposes Raja Chetak's suggestion to eliminate the defaulting princes, and, instead, suggests uniting the princes by eliminating Ambapali, who is the cause of their disunity. One old councillor suggests killing Ambapali to safeguard the liberty and peace of the land. Raja Chetak is shaken, but, as President, he calls for comments on the proposal. Vijaya Veera rises and says that Ambapali is the daughter of their soil, the most beautiful woman of their lands and killing the defenceless girl will be cold blooded murder which will stain the honour of Vaishali. He warns that a verdict to kill Ambapali will go against their principles of *dharma* and lose them the faith of the people who adore Ambapali and the loyalty of some princes who love her with pure motives. He pleads that some course other

than death be resorted to. As commander-in-chief, he warns that Ms men cannot fight with bold vigour if they have the blood of Ambapali on their hands. Raja Chetak is not ready to compromise on the welfare of Vaishali. At the same time, he will not sign the death warrant of his foster daughter Ambapali. So he puts the proposal to vote after vacating Ms seat as President. But the proposal to kill Ambapali is defeated by one hundred two votes to nine (Raina, *Ambapali* 267-71).

A shrewd and subtle councillor proposes that Ambapali be made *nagar vadhu*, the city's bride, allowed to marry none, as she will be married to the State and required to entertain all the princes of the federation. No one will have a right to insult her privacy on pain of death. This will kill all the rivalry and unite the princes. TMs has been done before and the ceremony to do so is prescribed. The proposal is unanimously accepted. A decree is drawn and all the members sign the judgement unanimously. Vijaya Veera is not happy, because he knows of Ambapali's love for the merchant, but he perceives that sacrifices have to be made in times of war. Raja Chetak is unhappy because the decree will paralyse Ambapali's will. He gives the proclamation to Vijaya Veera and asks Mm to break the dreadful news gently to Ambapali. Vijaya Veera goes to Ambapali's palace with a heavy heart (Raina, *Ambapali* 272-74).

Ambapali is stunned to read the *parishacts* proclamation. But Vijaya Veera appeals to her love of her motherland. She is persuaded and convinced. She signs her consent. As Vijaya Veera turns to leave, Raja

Chetak comes there crestfallen. Ambapali will not have him grieve on her account and says so. Raja Chetak and Vijaya Veera leave, proud of Ambapali's sacrifice of her love. As she waits impatiently for her lover, she hears the drum beaters announce the proclamation and the invitation to the ceremony to instal Ambapali as *nagar vadhu*. At last, seeing Ajat Shatru riding towards her palace, she asks her maid Paragani to bring the *vijaya tilak* and the garland with which to send him off to the front (Raina, *Ambapali* 275-82). Ajat Shatru hurries in and asks Ambapali to leave with him at once. She protests that now she cannot go with him. Ajat Shatru says that he has heard the proclamation, but will not lose his love to a pack of fools, cowards and despicable worms. He says that they can both escape. She protests that the *parishad* is all powerful. Then Ajat Shatru reveals his true identity and asks Ambapali to be his queen. At this, Ambapali spurns him as the Magadh Monster. She puts the garland round his neck, applies the *kesar* paste to his forehead and strews the rice and the flowers on him, saying that the ceremony constitutes their marriage, and calling upon Paragani to bear witness to their marriage. Ambapali faints. Ajat Shatru kisses her on the lips and whispers his love. As Paragani comes with some maids, he tells her to tell Ambapali when she comes to that he will ever keep her love with him till he wins her or dies on the battle-field. He removes his diamond ring and places it on Ambapali's finger, but the ring falls off. Giving Paragani a string of pearls, he tells her to take good care of Ambapali and, mounting his horse, rides away (Raina, *Ambapali* 282-85).

Ambapali goes to the *agni tal*, the sulphur spring, for the *havan*, the oath-taking ceremony, carried in a litter by the princes and the chieftains. Repeating after a priest, she vows to abide by the rules of the high status conferred on her by the *maha gana parishad* (Raina, *Ambapali* 286).

The princes enter the lake after Ambapali and take their oath:

“We the princes and chieftains of the *gana tantra*, vow to take upon us the equal responsibility, of supporting and protecting, with wealth and regard, our *nagar vadhu Devi* Ambapali! We swear before the mighty Sun, to respect the sanctity of the *Jan Path Kalyani Nagar Vadhu*. We vow to be loyal to her and to our *maha gana tantra* forever.” (Raina, *Ambapali* 287)

Ambapali, taking the holy water in her hands and offering it to the *Surya Deva*, says: “Thus I will give of myself to all and to none in particular, like the *Surya Deva* who shines on all and can stay for none. So help me God” (Raina, *Ambapali* 287).

In the final ceremony, the princes wait in a line for Ambapali, who, dressed and decorated as a bride, puts the *tilak* on their forehead. She marks each prince’s forehead with the *vijaya tilak* and garlands him. Each prince presents her with costly jewellery as a token of their new relationship. Then the princes march in a procession to her palace, carrying her in a litter amidst music and cheers. After escorting her to her palace, the princes leave for their homes to prepare for their departure to the front (Raina, *Ambapali* 287-88).

Vaishali, putting up an unprecedented show of unity and zeal, wins the next battle, counterattacking the Magadhians before they are ready for it. Boiling with frustration and humiliation, Ajat Shatru hardens his determination to win Vaishali and make Ambapali his queen. He sends for Vasakar and asks about Kautilya's experiments. Vasakar says that Kautilya's weapons are ready and Ajat has only to send men to bring them to Pataliputra. After Vasakar leaves him, Ajat goes to his men, who have begun festivities at his command. He confesses that they lost the war because he was distracted by love. He asks them to win his love for him. His men vow to do so. Ajat asks Abhaya Singh to go to Kautilya's forest and bring the new weapons including the *vish sundari*, the poison girl, whom Vasakar proposes to send into Vaishali as a gypsy girl with whom Chitra Sena is supposed to fall in love so that, when the war starts, she will love and kill those whom Vasakar singles out (Raina, *Ambapali* 295-302).

Vijaya Veera informs Raja Chetak of Ambapali's unfortunate love, her *gandharva* marriage to Ajat Shatru and her expected child. Raja Chetak bemoans the irony of fate, whereby Ambapali is to bear his great grand child while he fights its father, his own grandson. He is anxious to keep the matter a secret and consults *Guru Deva* Kashyap (Raina, *Ambapali* 303). The *Guru Deva* solves the problem with a simple order that reads:

“It is declared that *Nagar Vadhu, Jan Path Kalyani, Devi* Ambapali shall abstain from all festivities till the war is over. She shall devote her time to prayer and solitude for the victory of her

**country and the safe return of her valiant princes and soldiers.”**

(Raina, *Ambapali* 304)

Ambapali is grateful for the graceful wording of the order and vows to make every letter of it come true. She often seeks *Guru Deva* Kashyap in her grief. He comforts her and comes to see her whenever he visits the palace (Raina, *Ambapali* 304).

Vaishali gradually wins battles, but many Lichchavi princes and soldiers are wounded. Ambapali converts a part of her palace into a nursing home for the wounded. Prince Chandrahas, who has become a Buddhist *bhikku*, comes as usual, with other *bhikkus*, begging for alms. Ambapali denounces the *bhikkus* as selfish and slothful cowards who roam the streets as beggars to avoid fighting for their freedom and working for their meal. Ambapali challenges Prince Chandrahas to come near her and fight the temptation of her beauty. Prince Chandrahas, however, dare not presume to assume that he has conquered desire or that he is competent to teach her. He says that he is still trying to learn Buddha's teachings by living like a *bhikku* and has yet to take the *deeksha*, the confirmation ceremony. Ambapali criticises Buddha's teachings and his influence on the people of Vaishali. Prince Chandrahas is only tentative in his defence of Buddha's teachings and of Ms disciples, but he asserts that Ambapali should refrain from judging Buddha until she has met him. He informs her that Buddha will soon visit Vaishali at the invitation of the richest *shreshti* of the city. As Prince Chandrahas takes his leave, it is clear that he has instilled doubts in

her mind (Raina, *Ambapali* 306-19).

Vimal Kund, Ambapali's son by Ajat Shatru, grows up a lonely child. He plies his teachers, the *dasies* and his mother with questions that leave them perplexed. Only Prince Chandrahas answers Vimal Kund's questions with patience and honesty. Vimal Kund is gradually drawn towards Prince Chandrahas. One day Vimal Kund tearfully begs Prince Chandrahas to take him with him, away from the golden cage into which he has been put. Ambapali is mortified to perceive that she has somehow failed her son. She takes it out on Prince Chandrahas, but he silences her by pointing out that Vimal Kund needs a father. Ambapali turns imploringly to Vimal Kund, who assures her that he will not leave her unless she bids him go. Ambapali agrees with Prince Chandrahas that Vimal Kund needs a father and so asks him to keep coming to her palace (Raina, *Ambapali* 357-64).

Considering the predicament of Vaishali, Ambapali wishes to challenge Buddha, who, in her perception, brings disaster to her land, as Raina records:

Lord Buddha was coming to Vaishali. Ambapali wondered what Buddha was like. She wondered what he had in him that so captured the hearts of the people. She had heard a lot about his teachings but she did not believe in them. She wondered if she could fight him in Vaishali. She felt she must save the men of her state from becoming unpatriotic, slothful monks. She must rouse in them enthusiasm and love for their country's honour. She

thought she will challenge Buddha and show her people what he preached was shameful cowardice in the garb of *nirvan*.

(*Ambapali* 375-76)

On the day of Buddha's arrival in Vaishali, Ambapali rides out in her chariot with her maid Paragani to still the restlessness in her heart. Paragani cautions her about the procession of *bhikkus* moving towards them, but Ambapali refuses to change her course for them. One of the *bhikkus* stops her chariot by seizing the reins of the horses. An altercation ensues wherein Ambapali spews contempt on Buddha and his preachings and his followers. Suddenly Prince Chandrahas arrives on the scene with Buddha's direction to his followers to let Ambapali proceed undisturbed on her way. Ambapali contemptuously and angrily resumes her ride (Raina, *Ambapali* 381-85). However, as Raina describes, an epiphany awaits Ambapali:

Ambapali had started off in her wrath. But as she passed the centre of the long procession, her eyes were caught by the fluorescent halo of gentle light which emanated from the serenity of some being who stood there in the midst of the crowd and yet aloof from it. He seemed to smile on her. So taken up was she by the gentle smiling radiance of a face she had never seen before that she kept looking back straining her neck to see what she had seen as she had flashed past him. . . she saw again the same face looking at her as if through the mists, still smiling.

She had passed the procession. Paragani had taken up the

reins. She [Ambapali] turned and looked before her on the empty road, but the face she had just seen through the dust, was still before her eyes. Still smiling, still glowing with the gentle glow of kind love and something utterly wordless which she had never felt or known before. His look seemed to have touched her as she passed him. The glow of his smile had melted her. She knelt on the curved railing of her chariot and bent her head on her hands.

“He has defeated us, Paragani,” she whispered. “He has defeated me in my victory. Did you see him Paragani? Did you see his smile?” she asked as if beaten. (*Ambapali* 385-86)

Paragani urges Ambapali to return home and rest in order to regain her composure, but Ambapali says:

“No Paragani, I will not go back defeated. But—neither can I now go forward. I must return. He was bigger than me. He smiled at me—at me, who shouted and scowled at him and his men. He smiled through the dust I flung at him. Oh! I am like that dust. I have lost, I feel so little—so petty, so dusty before him ... I must rise up. I must beg his pardon and make amends. I will not lose to him. I must not lose to him. Turn the horses Paragani,” she said sitting down. (Raina, *Ambapali* 386)

As they near the procession, Ambapali gets down from her chariot and, walking past the crowd, tells the chief *bhikku* meekly to tell Tathagat that she wishes to invite him to her palace. When the chief *bhikku* agrees to do

so, she requests him to tell Buddha also that she begs his pardon and she also begs the *bhikku*'s pardon (Raina, *Ambapali* 386-87).

Returning home by a circuitous route in order not to disturb Buddha's procession, Ambapali seeks solitude in her garden. Prince Chandrahas, who hurries to her side fearing what will happen if Buddha declines her invitation, sits by her side silently. Some time later a *bhikku* brings the news that Buddha will visit her palace the next morning, Ambapali is happy (Raina, *Ambapali* 387-89).

Ambapali spends the whole night with Prince Chandrahas and artisans to prepare her palace for Buddha's visit. Buddha comes to her palace and preaches to the people of Vaishali (Raina, *Ambapali* 389-93). He says:

“Wanting [,] ambition, wealth, fame, domination, love of conquest, love of lust, pride, power and passion. Our life is a continuous hankering of *trishna* [unquenchable thirst] after *tripti*, satiation. But the heart of our *trishna* is like the sieve. It can retain not the wine of pleasures, only the heavy pain remains; and *trishna* is for ever *atrapt*, unsatisfied. Thus ye see, how the endless strife prevails.

“We must then detach our soul from this self which is the body of *trishna*. In detaching our *atma*, soul, we unload all desires, and so all pain. We wake up new born with a selfless self, free from *trishna* and so full of *tripti*! Then do we tread the earth more godly than the gods—the gods that still want to be prayed to

and sung to and bowed to with offerings. The aching urge to live ends, and so life glides smooth into a quiet, nameless joy—a joy that matures into complete happiness, a serenity of mind, an absolution, which I call *nirvan*.” (Raina, *Ambapali* 393-94)

Buddha blesses Ambapali and eats the food served by her. After the meal, he retires for his siesta in the *parnakuti*, a hut made of leaves, specially prepared for him since he never lives in homes. In the evening he grants a special audience to Ambapali and invites her to open her heart to him. She does so and he clarifies many of her doubts. Finally Buddha blesses her and retires for meditation. As Buddha is leaving, Vimal Kund kneels and, clinging to Ambapali’s feet, begs her to let him go with Buddha. With tears coursing down her cheeks, Ambapali consents to this. The next day, at dawn, as Buddha prepares to leave, Ambapali offers her *amra van* to Buddha’s *sangh* and to Buddha himself her own son Vimal Kund. Buddha blesses Ambapali and leaves, holding Vimal Kund by the hand (Raina, *Ambapali* 395-403).

Vaishali is in peril. The Magadhians burst through one defensive wall after another. Raja Chetak is wounded and dies after asking his people to set fire to the city of Vaishali and flee to the jungles. *Guru Deva* Acharya Kashyap goes into the jungles. Paragani brings the news that Ajat Shatru has entered Vaishali and is marching into the city, wherein all resistance has ceased. Ambapali asks everyone to flee to the jungles. Paragani asks Ambapali to go with them, but she refuses to do so. A guard announces

that Ajat Shatru is coming towards Ambapali's palace. As Ambapali moves out, an armed Prince Chandrahas waits with some followers to convey her to safety. Ambapali says that she is dead. She commands everyone except Paragani to leave so that no man will pay homage to *Samrat* Ajat Shatru. All leave the scene except Paragani. Asking Paragani to put out all the lights and to tell Ajat Shatru that she is at her toilet, preparing to receive him, Ambapali retires (Raina, *Ambapali* 413-24).

Ajat Shatru enters Ambapali's light-less palace. Paragani tells him that her mistress is getting ready to receive him. She fearlessly taunts him as a killer and refuses to light the palace. As Ajat Shatru tries to frighten Paragani, Ambapali appears on the stairs, clothed in saffron robes and carrying in one hand her long silken hair, which she has shorn (Raina, *Ambapali* 425-26). As Ajat Shatru stands aghast, Ambapali tells him:

“I welcome you to darkness and despair, *Samrat* of Magadh ... I bring to you the offering of the defeated and the humbled. I have nothing to offer, yet I wished not to meet you empty handed. So I bring you this.... ‘A kingdom for the soft caressing fragrance of your silky hair,’ someone had once said to Ambapali. He was a merchant who loved her. Her hair I bring to you, and this ring which the merchant had put on her finger ere he fled away from her to die into a monarch.” (Raina, *Ambapali* 426)

Ajat Shatru is smitten with pain and helpless confusion. He stands still and silent, feeling defeated and lost, tired and humiliated. He is unable to

speaking even when Ambapali asks him to. She asks him to go with her so that she can see her motherland in the company of her conqueror and observe how the realm of his victory smiles on him and adds to his glory and power. They ride through the devastated city, Ajat Shatru sitting silent, as if hypnotised. Coming upon a Buddhist disciple preaching to a crowd of people, Ambapali has the chariot stopped. She and Ajat Shatru alight and see a tall boy preaching the message of Buddha. As the boy moves towards them, Ambapali tells Ajat Shatru that he is their son Vimal. Ambapali collapses and Ajat Shatru stands stunned. Vimal recognises her, but asks her for alms. She says that she now has only her self to give him. Vimal says that he will take her the next day to Samath, where Buddha awaits her to deliver her from sin, sorrow and strife. Vimal Kund turns to Ajat Shatru and asks for alms for the people who are now his. Ajat Shatru takes off his crown and offers it. Vimal declines it and asks for something not so heavy and awesome. So Ajat Shatru gives Vimal a string of pearls. At his prompting Ambapali gives Vimal the ring with the solitaire diamond which Ajat Shatru left on her finger when parting from her. Vimal Kund asks the people to join him in reciting Buddha's mantras of happiness. Vasakar and Abhaya Singh take Ajat Shatru away. Vimal Kund asks Ambapali to go home and get ready to leave for Samath with him the next day (Raina, *Ambapali* 426-33).

About fifteen years later, Ambapali sets out in a ship from Seth Bund Rameshwaram for Lanka (Ceylon) as Buddha's messenger and disciple,

after having crossed the peninsula on foot, moving from village to village, spreading the light (Raina, *Ambapali* 434-35). The first woman to be admitted by Buddha into his fold, she has emerged cleansed of her past, as Raina states:

The *nagar vadhu* of Vaishali, the city's bride, was now the bride celestial of all humanity. Ambapali was now a name which brought a tranquil smile on all who had had the privilege of having met her. Her beauty grew and ascended, and those who heard her talk and saw her smile were lifted above the sordid pettiness of life, drawn by her magnetic soul.... (*Ambapali* 435)

Ayyar's short novel *The Legions Thunder Past* portrays three women: Kalavani, the wife of Asvajit, King of Asvakani, who, at the death of her husband in battle, surrenders to Alexander in order to save her son's life and ultimately becomes the Macedonian's mistress; Queen Swamamayi, the wife of King Poros of the Jhelum Valley; and, Princess Santavati of Simhapura, the niece of Swamamayi, who happens to be visiting with her uncle and aunt when Chandragupta comes to Boukephala to seek Alexander's aid to extirpate the usurping Navanandas. She falls in love with Chandragupta at first sight, contracts a *gandharva* marriage with him in the dungeon in which Alexander has imprisoned him for daring to defy **him** and, with Swamamayi's help, facilitates his escape from the dungeon and his flight to Simhapura, where she herself follows him and marries him.

Karala, the special envoy of Taxila and Omphis, meets Asvajit, King of

the Asvakas and his Queen, Kalavani, in the great fortress city of Masika, their capital. Karala is a relation of Kalavani, who has implicit confidence in his wisdom. She is also the cousin of Omphis. The King of Taxila and his son Omphis have sent Karala to warn Asvajit and Kalavani of Alexander's plan to attack their fort and to convey their advice to submit, like them, to Alexander and save their lands and liberties. Asvajit, however, says that the Asvakas have never submitted to anyone willingly. Kalavani is impressed by Karala's accounts of Alexander's conquests and suggests submitting to him. But her husband is adamant. He refuses to swear allegiance to Alexander, though his wife is for it. He does not want to bring his country to disgrace. He has confidence in his own forces and in the mercenaries under Vijayavarman. In case Masika falls, they can fall back on the fort of Aomos, which has been prepared for a long siege and entrusted to Ms mother (Ayyar, *Legions* [22]-25).

A messenger brings the news that the Yavana army is only twenty miles away. Asvajit leaves to confer with Vijayavarman. Karala goes to work on Kalavani's mind. He reports Omphis's confidence in the intelligence of Kalavani as opposed to Asvajit's obstinacy. Kalavani regrets the Asvaka people's lack of sense and ignorance of politics. She complains that the only thing they know is to fight. She blushes on hearing that Alexander is as handsome among men as she is among women. It is clear that she has little love lost for her warrior husband, who looks like a wolf (Ayyar, *Legions* 26; [22]).

After three days of futile attempts to capture the fort, Alexander, who has been wounded on his leg by an Asvaka arrow, decides that Asvajit is the soul of the Asvaka resistance and points out that he is always in front of his men and makes an easy target. At the next attack, hundreds of missiles are targeted on Asvajit and he is wounded and killed. As the Asvakas stand disheartened by the death of their leader, Alexander storms the fortress. Kalavani, won over to the policy of submission by Karala at this critical moment, orders her soldiers to stop fighting. She meets Alexander with her infant son and prays him to spare her son. Alexander is dazzled by her beauty and sends them to a tent (Ayyar, *Legions* 2 6-28).

Vijayavarman has retired to the inner fort which has provisions for nine months. Alexander calls upon Vijayavarman and his Madrakas to surrender. Since they are mercenaries, Vijayavarman says that they will not surrender and will evacuate the place only if permitted to withdraw honourably and with all their arms. Alexander offers them service under him. Vijayavarman replies that the Asvakas must release them from obligation and ask them to take service elsewhere. He insists that Kalavani is still their mistress though Alexander's prisoner and so she must give the order as their employer. Alexander calls Kalavani and orders her, on pain of her son's death, to release the Madrakas under Vijayavarman from their obligation to her and to ask them to take service elsewhere. Kalavani does so in tears (Ayyar, *Legions* 28-30).

Alexander promises not to molest the Madrakas when they are

withdrawing. He renews his offer of service. He urges them to disregard Chanakya's advice, cited earlier by Vijayarman, never to fight for foreigners against Aryans or Aryavarta, Vijayarman says that he will consider the proposal and reply in two days. But, learning of their decision not to serve him, Alexander attacks them treacherously and massacres all of them (Ayyar, *Legions* 29-31).

To celebrate the fall of Masika and the extirpation of the Madrakas, Alexander throws a banquet in the Greek camp that night. Kalavani participates in the banquet as Kleophis, the new ally of the Macedonians. At the end of the revels, she retires with Alexander to his tent. Onesikritos, the pilot of Alexander's ship and his personal attendant, tells Sasigupta, the captain of the Indian mercenaries serving Alexander, that Kalavani has been very easily conquered by Alexander. Sasigupta points out that it is the ancient custom of the Asvakas for a wife to commit *sati* on her husband's funeral pyre. He says that Kalavani has sacrificed all, carried away by her love for her son and her great anxiety to save him. Osenikritos scoffs that there is no sacrifice involved because she has got the conqueror of the world, who is not usually susceptible to female charms. He says that Kalavani should thank the stars for this unusual luck and adds that she will now get a glorious son who will remake the history of the Asvakas. Sasigupta says that, according to Indian custom, any son of hers by Alexander will not get a single Asvaka to uphold his claims. He points out that the surviving Asvakas have already proclaimed the mother of Asvajit

Queen and have retired to Aomos, which is more impregnable than Masika (Ayyar, *Legions* 31-32).

Prince Chandragupta, as counselled by his mentor Chanakya, goes to Boukephala to meet Alexander and seek his military aid to dislodge the usurping Nandas from the throne of Magadha. King Poros, King of the Jhelum Valley, receives him and houses him in his palace near the ladies' apartments. An hour before his meeting with Alexander, Princess Santavati of Simhapura, the niece of Poros, who is sitting near a window with her aunt Queen Swamamayi, slyly throws a jasmine flower into the court-yard below. Swamamayi, however, notices this and also Santavati's satisfied smile a second later and, going to the window, sees Prince Chandragupta hurrying back to his room. Swamamayi comments on this and Santavati blushes. Santavati does not like the idea of Chandragupta seeking Alexander's aid to win back the Magadha empire from the Nandas. She does not like Alexander because he killed her cousins. At this, both of them cry and Swamamayi mentions that Santavati would have been her daughter-in-law if Aijun had not been killed by Alexander. Queen Swamamayi encourages Santavati's romance with Prince Chandragupta (Ayyar, *Legions* [96]-102).

Santavati proposes that they overhear the interview between Chandragupta and Alexander because she has a premonition that Chandragupta's proud spirit and Alexander's arrogance will clash. Swamamayi agrees. They go to the room behind the audience chamber and listen. Chandragupta tells

Alexander that the present rulers of Magadha are vile usurpers, treacherous and mean. He seeks Alexander's help to march on Pataiiputra to depose the Nandas and become King of Magadha. Alexander says that he has turned back because his men are homesick. Chandragupta points to some factors favouring an attack on Magadha. Alexander says that he will have to consult his generals but insists that, if he helps, Magadha must take a Greek Satrap to advise on foreign affairs and military matters and pay tribute like Omphis and Poros. Chandragupta offers to pay all Alexander's expenses and twenty-five million gold *panas*, but insists on remaining independent, and his own master. Alexander is arrogant and stubborn. Chandragupta cites the ancient Indian tradition of kings helping a dispossessed prince to regain his kingdom from usurpers on a footing of equality and not on condition of vassalage, which is regarded as dishonourable by both parties. Chandragupta says that the Greek code is not as high as the Indian one in such matters and that he will therefore prefer to go to the savage tribes of India (Ayyar, *Legions* 102-05).

Alexander says that he himself will march on Magadha. Chandragupta says that Alexander can conquer Magadha only with his help and not otherwise. Alexander says that, in that case, he will take Chandragupta as hostage. Chandragupta feels revulsion at Alexander's lack of ethics and defies him to do anything he can, declaring that he prefers death to aiding him in the conquest of Magadha. Alexander is enraged and asks his aides to imprison Chandragupta in Poros's dungeon until further orders. As he is

being led away, Chandragupta tells Alexander that he wishes his enemies the Nandas complete victory over Alexander's barbarians. He also pities his vassals Poros, Omphis and other Indian kings for the kind of master they have got. Alexander orders Chandragupta to be imprisoned in the dungeon without food and water (Ayyar, *Legions* 105-06).

Santavati is impressed by Chandragupta's bravery and vows to marry only him. She reviles the barbarian Yavanas for breaking all the laws of war and hospitality and for wishing to imprison and even kill a guest, that too in their Indian palace. She is determined to prevent it. Swamamayi wonders how they can do it, women as they are. Santavati asserts that they can do it. She knows of a trap-door opening into the dungeon. She proposes to enter the dungeon through this trap-door, rescue the prince and send him to Chanakya, who will be ready for all emergencies. She does not care what her uncle King Poros will say when Alexander finds out what has happened. Swamamayi cautions that it is dangerous and that her father will not approve of it. Santavati says that her father will approve of it. As for her uncle, she will pacify him later by appealing to his better nature. She declares that she must rescue Chandragupta or die. She reminds Swamamayi that she too is a princess of Simhapura, 'the house of the lion' and asks if they should become sheep now (Ayyar, *Legions* 107-08).

Santavati asks Swamamayi to have two horses waiting outside with a messenger, five other horses ready in the wood outside the city, and send word to Chanakya to go to the wood and wait for Chandragupta. Santavati

says that her heart is trembling for the fate of Chandragupta and that she cannot rest till she rescues him. Swamamayi readily offers to help, because she reminds her of her maiden days, when she felt about Poros exactly as she does now about Chandragupta. She hopes that Chandragupta will marry Santavati for thus saving his life. Santavati says that love demands no rewards and does not go abegging either. She declares that Chandragupta may love her as she hopes he does and that she will lose her peace of mind if he does not, but that she will not breathe a word to anybody. Swamamayi is proud of her niece (Ayyar, *Legions* 108).

Chandragupta is astounded to see a portion of the dungeon wall moving. He assumes that Chanakya is working a miracle and addresses his mentor. To his astonishment, it is Santavati who comes. She says that, seeing the shameful treatment meted out to him, she resolved to come to his rescue. He says that she has not only rescued him but also relieved him of the burden on his heart ever since he saw her and read the message in her eyes. He then returns the jasmine flower she dropped in the morning, which he has been treasuring near his bosom. Santavati blushes and commends his manly replies to Alexander, because she likes courage. Chandragupta takes courage and proposes to her. Santavati almost faints when Chandragupta holds her in his arms and says that he marries her in the *gandharva* way allowed to kshatriyas and kisses her, pressing her to his bosom. Santavati joyfully returns his embrace. She then leads him out of the dungeon to her room in the ladies' apartments. Santavati tells

Swamamayi of their *gandharva* marriage. Swamamayi wishes good luck to both of them. She urges Chandragupta not to betray the trust reposed in him and to treat Santavati always lovingly. She asks them to keep the marriage a secret until it is formally celebrated (Ayyar, *Legions* 109-10).

Swamamayi tells Chandragupta to put on the dress of a messenger and ride to the wood where Chanakya is waiting with men to leave for Simhapura. She mentions that Chanakya was a classmate of her brother King Vijayasimha's high priest and so expects no difficulty in having the marriage approved by Santavati's father. She is sending a letter to her brother King Vijayasimha, strongly recommending the marriage. She says that her husband will also send a similar letter in due course. Chandragupta gives Santavati a ring in token of their *gandharva* marriage. She gives him a scented handkerchief. Chandragupta leaves (Ayyar, *Legions* 110-12).

Chandragupta's escape is discovered. King Poros confronts Santavati and Swamamayi. Santavati proudly and boldly says that she opened the secret passage "in order to allow our guest to escape unhurt, and our honour to remain untarnished." Poros rages that this is betrayal of his oath of fidelity to Alexander. Swamamayi says that his immemorial loyalty to the traditions of his race, to protect his guest at all costs, must prevail over his new-born loyalty to Alexander. Santavati asks him to hand her over to Alexander to be punished in Chandragupta's place as she will love to die for his sake (Ayyar, *Legions* 118-19). Santavati stings King Poros by her words: . Three of your sons, O King, died so that our race may live

with honour: do you want to live so that our race may live in dishonour, perpetually subject to these barbarians? Alas, has the Lion of the Punjab become a circus lion dreading its keeper?" (Ayyar, *Legions* 119).

Queen Swamamayi assuages Poros's hurt pride. Santavati too hastens to seek his pardon and goes to her room. Swamamayi tells him of the *gandharva* marriage in the dungeon. Poros wonders what Santavati's father will say to all this. Swamamayi says that Chandragupta is already carrying her letter to King Vijayasimha. She has prepared the draft of a letter from him to Vijayasimha with which Santavati will leave the next day. Poros is not against the marriage after all and signs the letter prepared already (Ayyar, *Legions* 119-20).

Ayyar's *Baladitya* portrays several royal women: Empress Saraswati, the wife of Emperor Baladitya of the Gupta dynasty; Princess Charumati of Kalinga, who marries King Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala; Queen Mahamaya, the mother of Yasodharman; and the three wives of the Hun King Toramana, named Tushashpa, Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa. The Hindu queens play significant roles in the novel, advising the kings and influencing their conduct, but the Hun queens are passive characters who hardly influence their menfolk.

Narasimha Baladitya, the descendant of the Guptas and dispossessed King of Magadha, accompanied by his friend Yasodharman, the King of Malwa and Maha Kosala, and Bhanugupta, the King of Western Malwa, ride towards the fortress of Hunagarh in the Aravallis in order to rescue the

kshatriya maiden Saraswati, who, along with her father Raghupati, has been transported there at the behest of the counsellor of the barbarian Huns, the vile brahmin, Narayana, who plans to avenge himself on Raghupati for refusing to give his daughter in marriage to him and to ravish Saraswati in captivity. Though Bhanugupta has reneged on his allegiance to his Gupta overlord Baladitya and allied himself with the alien Huns who have conquered the Gupta empire and has thereby retained his kingdom of Western Malwa, he cannot stomach the designs of the vile brahmin against the beautiful kshatriya maiden Saraswati, whose hand Bhanugupta himself once longed for. So he has, risking everything, sought out the fugitive Baladitya and Yasodharman, informed them of the danger to Saraswati's honour and provided horses to effect the rescue (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 33-64).

Entering the forest of Viswakami, the three princes discover that Saraswati has already been rescued from the Huns by Hari Ram the dacoit and his band of highwaymen. Saraswati, mistaking Hari Ram for a marauder, appeals to the newly-arrived Baladitya to save her. Baladitya, mistaking Hari Ram's intentions, challenges him to a fight. When the mistakes are cleared, it is obvious that Saraswati and Baladitya have fallen in love with each other. In fact the two of them hold a tete-a-tete in which they implicitly declare their love for each other. Learning that Baladitya plans to leave for Keralaputra, Saraswati opts to go with him. It is decided that Baladitya should leave at once for Bharukachcha to engage berths on a ship leaving for Keralaputra and that Saraswati and the others should follow

later under the protection of Hari Ram (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 64-80).

Before they part, Yasodharman cautions Baladitya against marrying Saraswati:

‘She is beautiful beyond the race of women, talks pleasantly, and sings like an angel. But with all that, my lord, she would be a mesalliance to a person like you. She would be too low-born to be your queen and far too high-born to be anything else. So in the interests of both, my lord, I conceived it my duty to prevent such an alliance so injurious to the best interests of both....’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 82)

Baladitya replies:

‘ . . . . As for mesalliance, I call that a mesalliance where the parties concerned are divided in moral greatness and not as you take it to be, and as the world delights to call it, a mere disparity in worldly possessions and such other vanities as pride of place, birth etc. Judged by this standard, Saraswati is higher far than any princess I know of, and stands almost as high as Kumara Devi my ancestor, the daughter of the Lichchavis, the proud mother of Samudragupta.’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 82-83)

News reaches Ujjaini of the rescue of the prisoners by Hari Ram’s band of robbers. At once Narayana and Mihiragula, the brutish son of the Hun King Toramana, set out with two hundred horsemen. They intercept Hari Ram’s party. The robbers put up a spirited fight, but are outnumbered.

Hari Ram is overpowered by several Hun soldiers, but not before he deals a wound to Mihiragula, which forces him to return at once to Ujjaini.

Narayana takes the captives to the fortress of Hunagarh (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [102J-05]).

While being led to Hunagarh, Saraswati is worried that, with the turn of events, Baladitya may think that she has cheated him. Hari Ram assures her that he will tell Baladitya the facts and prevent a misunderstanding. Narayana attempts to be familiar with Saraswati, but Hari Ram puts him off. He warns Saraswati against the viper. Saraswati does not know what to do against\*“the importunities of this heartless villain,””and hopes for help only from Sita and Savitri, the legendary paragons of womanly virtue. They reach Hunagarh in ten days. Each captive is placed in a separate cell As ordered by Narayana, Saraswati is placed in a comfortable chamber, indicating Narayana’s vile intentions. She cries herself to sleep (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 106-08).

Saraswati is awakened by the door being opened. It is night and she is hungry. She sees a cup of milk and some fruits on a shelf and partakes of these. Narayana comes to her chamber with a servant carrying a cup of milk, a tender coconut and a bunch of plantain fruits. Narayana sends the servant away and shuts the door. Saraswati protests, but perceives that flight is no solution now. She appeals to his good sense to pity her and leave her. Narayana recalls her father’s arrogance in Ujjaini and says that, whereas he then offered marriage, he now offers her only concubinage

(Ayyar, *Baladitya* ([109]-11).

**Saraswati** replies spiritedly:

‘What do you oiler? Concubinage to a **Kshatriya** maiden! You villain, you debased wretch, you abhorred of Heaven, what do you offer? **Away**, I say, away to the hideous dens of iniquity, away to your palace of intrigue, away to your vile occupations of life! While the last drop of my blood runs in me, I shall resist you. . . . I am not a helpless maiden. I am aided by Sita and **Savitri** and **Damayanti** and Sakuntala. A chaste woman has the power of reducing to ashes any person, so proclaim our **Puranas**. Did not Damayanti blast the libidinous forester like that?’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 111)

As **Narayana** approaches her, Saraswati prays fervently and feels strong. Narayana says that, if she accedes to his wishes, he will love her, **honour** her, respect her and have her married to a respectable man. If not, he threatens to hate her **and** have her shame published to the world. As he advances further, Saraswati tells him that she is already wedded to Baladitya in mind. • He says that, if she accedes to his love, she will wed Baladitya. If not, **he** threatens **that** Baladitya will hear of her shame. He also threatens to inform **Mihiragula** of her treasonous contact with Baladitya and have her and her father executed. Saraswati perceives that cunning may be more effective than refusal. So she says that she wants some drink. Narayana takes the **cocoanut** and cuts it up. Saraswati takes **the cocoanut** and the

knife from him, makes a hole in the middle and drinks some of the juice. She offers the remainder of the juice to Narayana. As he puts the coconut to his lips, leans his neck backward and his eyes upward and drinks the water, Saraswati plunges the knife into his neck fully up to the hilt. The knife point comes out at the other side of the neck and Narayana falls back without a cry or a groan, dead. Saraswati, horrified at the sight of the red blood staining her hands and dress, reels back and faints (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 112-15).

Saraswati regains consciousness around midnight and realises that she must flee at once. She sees the bunch of keys in Narayana's girdle. She takes it and also the knife and goes out, after putting out the light and locking the door of the room behind her. She finds Hari Ram in the next room and frees him. She gives him the bunch of keys and the knife and asks him to free all the members of their party so that they can escape. **When everyone is free, they go to the stables, take enough horses for their use, kill the other horses with a powerful poison and noiselessly leave the fortress of Hunagarh and reach Hari Ram's own forest of Viswakami in eight days (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [116]-22).**

**Hari Ram brings Saraswati to Bharakachcha on the eve of the departure of the ship, much to the relief of Baladitya, who is loath to leave her to "the tender mercy of the Hun." Paramarathi, a rich merchant whom Baladitya has befriended, takes them to the mansion of his friend, where his wife and daughter are. Meeting by chance in the garden of the mansion,**

Baladitya and Saraswati openly declare their love for each other.

Paramarthy's daughter Parvati witnesses it and soon the whole household comes to know of it. The next day they leave by the ship the *Vikrama*, which takes them to Cranganore in Kerala in thirty days. Parvati advises Baladitya and Saraswati to get married in one of the temples in Kerala. Paramarthy introduces Baladitya to Raja Mahasena, who offers to help him to regain his throne, to drive the Hun barbarians out of India and to uphold the *dharma* of the land. Baladitya weds Saraswati the next day (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [189]-208).

Maharani Tushashpa, Toramana's wife, protests to her injured son Mihiragula that sending Saraswati to Hunagarh was a great sin. Mihiragula is contemptuous that, despite being a Hun, Tushashpa speaks in this strain. But Tushashpa protests that she is essentially a mother (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [208]-09).

Upon hearing that Saraswati has killed Narayana, Tushashpa says that she is proud of the girl and that she should have been born a Hun. She rejoices at Narayana's death (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 210). She explains why:

T never liked the sneaking wretch. He had neither the natural - courage of the Hun nor the finer virtues of the Indians. Besides, 'this Narayana must have tried to outrage that poor girl. We had no right to shut up that poor girl, none at all. If it had been our daughter, would you wish her to be unlike Saraswati?' (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 210)

Toramana's spy Sarvasammata brings news of the impending *swayamvara* of Princess Charumati of Kalinga, the daughter of King Gunasagara and Queen Dakshayani, whereat the competition for her hand will be very keen, since she is the most accomplished, princess in India and perhaps in the world. Toramana thinks that, if Mihiragula marries Charumati, his dynasty will take root in India and his rule in Magadha will become secure. Mihiragula consents to his father's wish. Toramana sends for his wives and consults them. Tushashpa is elated at the idea, but Yajheshpa and Hujhespa think that intermarriage with the weaker Indian, race will lead to degeneration of the Huns. Asked for his opinion, Sarvasammata suggests sending an Indian representative on behalf of Mihiragula to the *swayamvara*, so that, if the princess refuses the prince, the shame will be less than if Mihiragula were present there in person. It is decided that Bhanugupta should be sent to the *swayamvara* (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 219-23).

However, after the interview is over, Sarvasammata tells Bhanugupta: "What times we are living in! A Mlechcha Hun wants to marry a princess of the bluest blood in India! A mountain torrent wants to unite with the Divine Ganges!" Bhanugupta says, "The fun of it is that I am to be the agent for bringing this about.... I who would rather die than give my daughter in marriage to a Hun am asked to go and ask for the hand of a maiden of the bluest Kshatriya blood for a coarse barbarian (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 224-25).

**Maharani Mahamaya of Maha Kosala, the mother of Yasodharman, tells Sumati, Toramana's spy, of all that she has had to suffer in order to keep honour and independence:**

**\ . . . Ever since the defeat of the good king Skandagupta my life has been one of constant sorrow. The shadows deepened at the death of Prakasaditya. They have become even more deep at the expulsion of Baladitya from Magadha and his flight to Kerala. My poor son and I, we are always in flight. No hardship is too great for us provided we keep our honour, and independence. . .  
(Ayyar, *Baladitya* 230)**

**Sumati conveys the intelligence that Yasodharman is going to attend the *swayamvara* of Princess Charumati in order to woo her for his overlord Baladitya. Being told that Bhanugupta is to go to Kalingapatnam to woo Princess Charumati for Mihiragula, Sumati warns that the princess may reject Mihiragula. Sumati reports that Vasanta has gone to Kalingapatnam, probably to curry favour with Princess Charumati by using the arts of dancing, garland-making and combing, which she forced Sumati to teach her while she was in Kalanjar. Toramana commands Sumati to go to Kalingapatnam, ingratiate herself into Charumati's favour, and, if possible, get rid of Vasanta. Sumati agrees to do so (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 231-34).**

**Princess Charumati is the pride of the Kalingas and the citizens of Kalingapatnam vie with one another to prepare for her *swayamvara*:**

**Night and day for forty days, batches of them flocked to the**

throne-chamber and helped the palace servants in getting the place ready for the great event. For dear was Charumati to the hearts of the Kalingas. Many were the dowerless maids who had received suitable dowries to enable them to get married from the Princess Charumati and her mother Queen Dakshayani, countless were the poor who received food and clothing from the princess and her mother, and innumerable were the learned men who had been honoured by King Gunasagara, Queen Dakshayani and Princess Charumati. The princess was beautiful as all the princesses of her exalted line were. What endeared her most to the Kalingas was her great learning, immense piety, boundless charity and natural grace. Never did the Kalingas feel so proud as when they challenged the people of other states to name one princess equal to Charumati in all respects. They always looked forward to those ever-recurring learned assemblies convened by Gunasagara where the greatest scholars of India found difficulty in escaping undefeated by Charumati. They remembered also the 'Poor Man's Homes' started by the good princess whereby deserving poor couples got the minimum funds for starting a home and becoming self-sufficing. (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 238)

On the day of the *swavamvara*, with many Indian princes assembled for the occasion, Princess Charumati enters the hall with a garland in her hand, accompanied by her friend Subhashini, who is actually Vasanta of

Maha Kosala. The princess stands before each prince, while his herald announces the praises of his master. Every time the princess listens and says, “Pass on’.” When she comes before Bhanugupta, the greatness of Mihiragula is announced by his herald. Yasodharman objects that Mihiragula is not an Aryan and so has no right to be represented at the *swayamvara*. Yasodharman says that he represents Baladitya at the *swayamvara*. Bhanugupta ridicules the fugitive existence of Baladitya. Yasodharman rushes at Bhanugupta with drawn sword. Bhanugupta appeals to Gunasagara and his brother princes. Some of the princes intervene and pacify Yasodharman, citing Charumati’s freedom of choice (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 238-43).

Charumati questions Mihiragula’s right to be represented at her *swayamvara*, since he is not an Aryan prince. Bhanugupta says that Mihiragula has become a full-blooded Aryan since he came to Bharatavarsha (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 243). Charumati asks:

‘How can a Hun become an Aryan, prince? An Aryan is bom, not made. Not ten thousand kingdoms nor a hundred thousand troops can make anyone an Aryan who is not an Aryan. Birth in a royal family in the land of the Aryas is the only passport to Aryandom. So at least say our Puranas.’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 243)

Bhanugupta fights shy of Charumati’s learning, but urges the advantages of marrying the Hun prince, which will place a grandson of the Kalingas on the throne of the Guptas (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 243-44). But Charumati spurns

the very idea:

**‘Prince ... I have no desire whatsoever to see my son on an usurped throne. I would much rather see him beg from door to door than see him on a blood-stained throne wearing a crown dropping with the blood of some of the noblest Aryan princes who ever lived. And, besides, the Kalingas do not want a borrowed glory.’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 244)**

**Bhanugupta warns that, if Charumati rejects Mihiragula as her lord and husband, the Hun will ““over-run the land of the Kalingas with his myriad hosts and carry away the princess Charumati by force after carrying fire and sword throughout Kalinga and annexing his kingdom.”” (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 244). Unmoved by this threat, Princess Charumati says to Bhanugupta: ““Fellow, dare you threaten an Aryan princess who knows no fear? Go, tell your Mihiragula that he may come any day with his myriads of Mlechchas. He shall always find the Kalingas ready to meet them”” (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 244-45).**

**The assembled princes commend Charumati’s spirited response and one by one offer support to Kalinga in case of an attack by the Huns. Bhanugupta foolhardily insults all the assembled princes and a dozen of them draw their swords to kill him. At this, Bhanugupta pleads an ambassador’s immunity. King Gunasagara, as the host, pacifies the princes. Before Princess Charumati can pass on to the next prince, Bhanugupta renews his warning of the danger of destruction to Kalinga and says that she**

does not know the might of the Huns (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 245-46). Princess Charumati replies courageously:

I know it very well... but I know also that the mighty king of Magadha, Pushyamitra, was humbled by my ancestor Kharavela and that Susarman, the last of the Kanvas, had to yield the imperial city of Pataliputra to the Andhras. God will give power to the Kalinga King in a righteous fight. Well, if the worst comes to the worst, let Kalinga go to her ruin in this glorious fight against the barbarian, and the- foreigner. Even if ah the mountains of the world were determined to crush me and all the waters of the world conspired to drown me, my immortal soul will triumph over the limitations of the body and refuse to acknowledge defeat. I scom Mihiragula now more than I ever did. Go and tell him that ' no Aryan princess will even look at him. Let the barbarian and the foreigner seek for a bride among his own fellow-barbarians! .. (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 246-47)

Bhanugupta says that then it means war. Queen Dakshayani says: ““So be it ... my daughter shall never be given in marriage to a barbarian and a foreigner.”” King Gunasagara endorses her words and so do the assembled Kalingas (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 247).

After Charumati passes over some more princes, she stands before Yasodharman, because he has brought no herald. He speaks for his overlord Baladitya. But Mahasena of Kerala informs him that Baladitya has already

married **Saraswati. Subhashini prompts** Yasodharman to plead on his own behalf. Yasodharman says **that he is** unworthy of the great line in which he was born and has been unable to save his overlord from defeat and his own country from conquest and pillage (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 248-49). He paints a realistic picture of his present unworthiness and of the bleak future:

‘ . . . . All that I have got now are a few- miserable forts in the interior parts of my land. There, among the jungle tribes, lives the descendant of the mighty monarchs of old. My only consolation is that I am still free and that I have never even in my dreams thought of surrender unlike many seemingly prosperous monarchs. I have been faithful unto my friend and overlord; I have been faithful to my faith and country. This at least I have preserved out of the proud heritage I got from my ancestors. Princess, if you wed me you will have an anxious and dangerous life. You should say farewell to all luxury and ease. My mission in life is war with the Hun and the rescue of this ancient land from the rule of the barbarian, and the foreigner. In this one thing I am indomitable and my resolution is as fixed as the Himalayas. Had I been different, I could also have been prosperous like Bhanugupta, but I should have also sold my soul like Mm. Princess, I am convinced that you are fit partner for one who is engaged in this righteous war for the independence of our country. It is because of that belief that I wanted Baladitya to marry you.

Now that that **is impossible I ask you to marry me and be the sharer in my joys and sorrows** for all time to come. My heart and **my sword, which are about all I can call my own, I offer to you. . . .**"(Ayyar, *Baladitya* 249-50)

**With** a sweet and sad smile, Charumati garlands Yasodharman **to** the applause of the entire assembly. Gunasagara and Dakshayani invite all the assembled princes to the marriage festivities. Most of them accept the invitation (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 250).

On a spring day **Maharani Mahamaya, Maharani** Charumati and **Vasanta discuss the prospects of the war for which their soldiers left a fortnight ago. Mahamaya is worried that the forces of their distant allies may not reach the battlefield in time. Charumati, however, is optimistic. Vasanta furnishes the relevant statistics. A messenger brings the news that Emperor Baladitya has joined the allies with some troops. He says that Empress Saraswati will arrive in Kalanjar the next day and stay there till the fighting is over. He reports that Pataliputra in Magadha has been captured by the allies and Baladitya crowned Emperor there. He also reports of generous efforts at mobilisation and addition of forces. He says that the princes from South India have decided not to keep their promise of assistance, largely because of the fear that, if the Huns are defeated, Kalinga will become so powerful as to become a menace to themselves. Charumati laments the “eternal jealousies and unnatural fears” of the princes of this “unfortunate country”** (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [251]~260). **Mahamaya tells her**

that **this** has been the Indian tradition:

**'it was always like that, my dear. . . . When the barbarian invaded the land in the time of Paurava, Ambhi of Takshasila turned traitor to his country' and ideals; when the barbarian king's general crossed the Sindhu, the petty kings of Avanti and Malwa aided him against the Emperor Chandragupta; when the Sakas and the Yuehchis came, it was the same story all over; again, when Milinda the Yavana came to attack Pushyamitra Sunga, Kalinga aided the barbarian; lastly, when the blood-thirsty Huns came to this country, the ungrateful princelings deserted the banner of the great Skandagupta and Prakasaditya and took sides with the barbarian and the foreigner. See, for instance, Bhanugupta and Budhagupta. These hell-hounds were given preferments by the Gupta Emperors, and what is the return they made? They sold themselves to the Hun as soon as they were promised secure tenure of the provinces which they now hold and betrayed their master and country. Such betrayals and treacheries will occur as long as there is Bharatavarsha. The future history of our motherland will show these evils in even an increasing degree since the Kali Age is steadily advancing, undermining the little morality that remains. '** (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 260-61)

Three days later, news reaches Kalanjar of the victory of the allies in a decisive battle outside Pataliputra. The messenger reports that differences

have arisen between Baladitya and Gunasagara on the one hand and between Baladitya and Kiunarpala on the other. Charumati wonders if the Aryan princes will ever learn to unite, eschewing differences, and avoid playing into the hands of the common foe. Mahamaya laments that disunities and betrayals will prevail as long as there is a Bharatavarsha. The messenger says that Baladitya has become a Buddhist and proclaimed the fact widely. This has offended Yasodharman. He has kept away from the second coronation of Baladitya and also repudiated his leadership and persuaded Gunasagara also to do so. Charumati tells Saraswati that her husband will perhaps come round soon. In any case she pleads that the quarrel between their husbands should not strain their relationship. Saraswati echoes the same sentiment. Mahamaya prays that God should prevent enmity between Baladitya and Yasodharman. She blames the evil goddess of dissension for putting the idea of religious conversion into Baladitya's head. Saraswati defends her husband's right to become a Buddhist if his conscience so dictates. Mahamaya is sure that she can successfully mediate between Baladitya and Yasodharman (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 273-79).

Ananda, a customer, tells the shopkeeper Dharmadatta of Queen Charumati's visit to Empress Saraswati:

'The queen stayed at the palace for five days and then went back to Amalपुरi. There is a romantic attachment between the Queens Charumati and Saraswati which withstands the coldness

existing between **their husbands**. It is whispered that but for **Queen Charumati Yasodharman** would not have protected the **Magadha army rear** when it retreated after the disastrous battle of **Benares**. At first **Yasodharman** seems to have said that he would not shed the blood of the four castes for defending **Buddhists** who were opposed to the **Vedas and Sastras**. On this, **Queen Charumati** seems to have declared that even according to the **Hindu Sastras** a righteous king should aid the weak and that therefore **Yasodharman**, as a Hindu king, was bound to protect the weak and dispirited **Magadha army**. **Yasodharman** yielded to his wife and did what she wanted. So **Magadha** was saved from utter ruin and disgrace because of this remarkable lady and her friendship with **Maharani Saraswati**.' (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 283)

**Dharmadatta**, in turn, tells **Ananda** of an instance of how **Maharani Saraswati** counsels her husband prudently:

\... She [**Saraswati**] has prevailed upon the Emperor to give up the slice conquered from **Kalinga** [by **Samudragupta**] and thus has healed up an old sore. What is more, she dissuaded **Baladitya** from annexing some portions of **Kamarupa** by pleading for the unfortunate **Kumarapala** and representing to her husband that generous treatment would win a valuable ally in time of need whereas cruel terms would create an everlasting enmity between **Magadha** and **Kamarupa**. The Emperor listened to her advice,

and Kumarapala was so moved by the generosity with which he was treated that he swore eternal friendship with Baladitya and promised substantial aid in times of war.' (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 283-84)

Ananda says that Maharani Saraswati is going to have a spacious Saraswati Vidyalaya at Nalanda for the education of women in all the arts and sciences. Dharmadatta says that the education of women did not receive such special attention before, only those who could afford it engaging tutors for their daughters. Ananda says that Queen Charumati has started an institution similar to Maharani Saraswati's at Kalanjar, where she is the teacher for every subject. Ananda says that Charumati is highly educated because, being born a princess, she had a tutor for every subject; she is an adept in all the six systems of philosophy; she is a past master in dialectics, and she has read *Panini* and *Patanjali* so well that few pandits can beat her in grammar; and, with all this, she is not a bit pedantic, but moves freely with all without trying to impress them with her learning (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 287-88).

Ananda describes to Dharmadatta an incident to prove that Charumati has a truly princely mind:

'... When Queen Charumati had come to Pataliputra on her visit to Queen Saraswati, they both went out one day for a drive in the town. A little girl of three belonging to the Chandala caste was weeping bitterly in the streets as the chariot passed by. The

royal attendants tried to push the girl out of view but Queen Saraswati insisted on stopping the chariot and consoling the poor girl. She semi-automatically excused herself to Queen Charumati for fondling a Chandala girl and said, “I have turned a Buddhist like my husband, and I don’t observe any caste.” Queen Charumati kissed the small girl and said, “Saraswati, it is not necessary to become a Buddhist in order to fondle children, it is enough to be a woman!” p] (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 288-89)

**Ananda comments on Maharani Saraswati’s conversion to Buddhism.:**

‘She has now fully come to believe in the doctrines of *ahimsa* and caste equality preached by the Buddha. So far she is a Buddhist. But she has a passionate attachment to the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, an attachment far stronger than that which she has for the *Jataka* stories. Unlike her husband, she has still a living faith in the innumerable gods and goddesses of Hinduism whom she regards as so many different manifestations of the One God who came as Rama, Krishna and Buddha. What is still more curious, she has a fervent faith in the approaching *Avatar* of Kalki, a faith much stronger than that in the coming Maitreya.’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 289-90)

King Toramana dies. His junior wives Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa wail frantically. His senior wife Tushashpa stands in a corner without much loud demonstration, but tears freely trickle down her cheeks. Hujheshpa says

that she and **Vajheshpa** will go to the grave. She asks **Tushashpa** to remain behind to look after Mihiragula. But Tushashpa **insists** on **joining them**. All three of them aver that they are obeying time-honoured Hun custom in doing so. **Tushashpa's** parting advice to her son Mihiragula **is** significant:

\ . . . Son, I never like your Hunnish cruelty or rank **irreligion** or bestial immorality. By God's grace we are now in a land with better ideas of humanity, religion and morality. Why can you not like your dead father adapt yourself to the land of your adoption and cast off your evil ways? Even now it is not too late. Many an Indian princess, stick to her, call the best men of India to advise you in government and go by their advice. Thus you **will** prosper and be loved and respected. If you go on in your present strain, you will soon become odious and be driven out of the country by a people exasperated by your evil acts. ' (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 293)

Vajheshpa protests against Tushashpa's advice:

'In so many words, you ask our son to desert the habits and customs of his ancestors and to become like the decadent races of this country. We won because we were Huns and not because we were Hindus! Marry an Indian princess! What next! Adopt Indian ideas of religion and morality! Why, this is sheer nonsense.... We are Huns. We are not Hindus. The Hindus can beat us always in their own ideas. Once we accept them we are

courting rain.... **My son**, remain **true** to the **Hunnish** ideal.

(Ayyar, *Baladitya* 293-94)

Tushashpa counters **Vajhespa's** advice:

‘.... The **Kshatriyas** of India are as brave as any Huns, and no serious danger of physical degeneracy threatens the Huns by intermarriage with them. Mentally, there will be a great

- improvement in us by following such a course. Harness the high **chivalry** of the Kshatriyas to the fierce courage of the Hun and you **will** get a type of warrior whom it will be hard to beat in this world. By the course I suggest the Huns will become rooted in this country and will be honoured and respected in course of time.

**Vajheshpa's** advice will lead the Huns to isolation and ultimate but inevitable defeat....’ (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 294)

**Hujheshpa** agrees with **Tushashpa**, sees the wisdom of her plan and strongly recommends it to **Mihiragula**:

\ ... I see no good in the Huns' remaining as wandering tribes without a habitation, a religion, a code of morality and a law of war. The lands of the Orus valley are not half so good as the lands here. The people here are also much more advanced in the sciences and in religion and morality. At this solemn moment I see the wisdom of our dear, dear husband's policy...(Ayyar, *Baladitya* 294-95)

**Mihiragula** tells his three mothers that he will follow the advice of all

three of them as far as he can. Vajheshpa regrets that Toramana died broken-hearted over a defeat. Tushashpa says that the causes of Toramana's death were his brother Bhumaka's death and Mihiragula's tactless nature and not any defeat, because, being a true warrior, he did not attach much weight to defeats, which, he knew, could be redeemed with victories. Vajheshpa proposes that they all go to the graveyard to be buried with Toramana. Tushashpa says that Toramana has ordered that he should be burnt like the Hindus. At the burning ghat the three Queens courageously ascend the funeral pyre to which Mihiragula sets fire (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 295-97).

Twenty-eight years after the victory at Pataliputra, Mahamaya regrets that the Huns have not been driven out of Aryavarta. Since then the differences between Baladitya and Yasodharman have been intensifying rather than disappearing and now they have become a conflict of ideals almost as great as that between the Huns and the Hindus. She recalls how, fifteen years ago, she persuaded Yasodharman to drop his differences with Baladitya for the sake of India and he most unwillingly consented to place all his forces at the disposal of Baladitya, but the Emperor's cold reply threw cold water on Yasodharman's schemes and drove him into a frenzy of fury (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 301-02).

Yasodharman. says that Baladitya has become a coward after embracing Buddhism. Charumati refutes this and points out that only Baladitya's ideas of the duties of a king have changed considerably. She

cites the incident of Baladitya plunging into the swollen Ganges to rescue a poor woman who was about to drown. Yasodharman complains that Baladitya has become the slave of Buddhist monks and nuns. Charumati asks Yasodharman why he has not tried on his own to drive the Huns out of Bhatavarsha. He gives convincing reasons for it, but he accepts her suggestion. Mahamaya is overjoyed at this. So is Charumati (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 302-07).

Mahamaya says that, if Yasodharman sends emissaries all round, his action will demonstrate to all the princes that Ms motive is not personal agrandisement or dynastic glory but the interests of the bleeding motherland. Yasodharman is loathe to seek Baladitya's help, but Charumati insists on it and proposes to meet Saraswati for this purpose. She advises Yasodharman to swallow his pride for the common cause of Aryan civilisation. Mahamaya points out the advantages of involving Baladitya in the enterprise. Charumati says that Yasodharman should rightfully be the leader of the movement. Charumati decides that she will go to Kalinga and rouse the people of Kalinga, while Vasanta should go to Pataliputra to work on Maharani Saraswati's mind. Yasodharman is to remain in Kalanjar and plan the campaign (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 308-11).

Charumati exhorts the Kalingas to participate wholeheartedly in the endeavour to liberate Aryavarta, Aryadharma and Aryamata from the bloody hands of the alien Huns and they respond enthusiastically (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 312-16). At Pataliputra, Vasanta wins Saraswati over to the

cause by narrating to her the travails of the people of her native city of Ujjaini at the hands of the Huns. Saraswati, in turn, persuades Baladitya, after wearing down his objections, to join the-cause of the Aryans (Ayyar, *Baladitya* ■ 317-21).

The Huns are defeated decisively and Mahamaya and Charumati rejoice. However, the arrival of the wounded Murari, the eldest son of Baladitya, dampens their joy. They nurse him: with love and care. It is clear that Murari longs to see his mother. But Saraswati is held up at Pataliputra because Baladitya is very ill. Yasodharman returns to Kalanjar as the Emperor of Bharatavarsha. He goes to Murari's bedside. Murari is eager to meet his mother. Charumati informs Yasodharman that Maharani Saraswati is expected that evening, since Baladitya's condition has improved (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [371]-78).

Charumati begs Yasodharman to make up his quarrel with Baladitya at least on account of Murari. Yasodharman agrees to do so as soon as Baladitya recovers. Mahamaya is happy at his decision and says that, essentially, Baladitya is noble-hearted and generous. Yasodharman confesses that he has now recognised his error (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 378). Saraswati arrives at Kalanjar. After seeing his mother, Prince Murari dies (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 378-80).

Saraswati returns to Pataliputra bent down with sorrow over the death of her eldest son Murari. She finds Baladitya worse than when she left for Kalanjar. • Despite Saraswati's ministrations, Baladitya's condition worsens

steadily. It is clear that his end is near. One day **Baladitya** calls Saraswati to his bedside. **He asks** her not to commit sati after his **death, -because sati** is not an Aryan usage. He wants **her** to live on and look after her remaining children, Dharmagupta and **Narayani**, and their beloved subjects of Magadha. Saraswati agrees to do so. He asks her to ensure that no widow lacks means **of honourable** livelihood and no orphaned child feels the pangs of starvation. **Saraswati** promises to do so. He wants her to do more than **what he** has so far done to alleviate the misery of the **outcastes**, who are treated worse than dogs and pigs. Saraswati agrees to do her best for the outcastes. Baladitya dies (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [381]-89)»

Yasodharman wishes to replace the barber high priest of the famous temple at Puri **Jagannath** by a brahmin. Charumati objects to this idea because, as a native **of Kalinga**, she knows the story that it was the Lord of the Universe himself who installed a barber as the hereditary high priest in the place of the brahmin priest. However, she tells Yasodharman that **the hereditary barber priests of Puri Jagannath have become as communal-minded as the brahmin priests. She warns him against changing what has been the custom for centuries. A messenger from Pataliputra comes to the palace amidst signs of an impending storm. Yasodharman says that they will both go to Pataliputra so that he can make peace with Baladitya. Charumati is overjoyed. But the messenger says that Baladitya is dead. Yasodharman and Charumati cry like children. Charumati is relieved to learn that Saraswati has not committed sati** (Ayyar, *Baladitya* [391]-96).

Yasodharman is filled with remorse. He regrets his conduct towards Baladitya and his boastful inscriptions of having brought the whole of Bharatavarsha under his umbrella. Charumati consoles him saying that though he misunderstood Baladitya's motives, he was never guilty of meanness or ingratitude. She suggests that they go to Pataliputra and help Saraswati and her children, thereby atoning for their conduct towards Baladitya. Yasodharman wishes to expose himself to the storm raging on the seashore in order to assuage the storm of anguish raging in his heart. So they both go to the seashore. Yasodharman seems to have turned mad and wishes to die by rushing into the sea. With great tact Charumati accuses him of cowardice and dereliction of duty. This arrests the deranged impulses of Yasodharman and brings him back to his senses (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 396-400).

Yasodharman, and Charumati return to the palace. He wishes to do something in token of the memory of Baladitya. She says that he can do three things to please Baladitya's soul.: protect Saraswati and her son Dharmagupta against their foes, cease to hate Buddha and Buddhism and try to alleviate the condition of the outcastes. Yasodharman agrees to do so. He also decides not to disturb the barber priest of Puri Jagannath as he originally proposed to do (Ayyar, *Baladitya* 401).

Uma Parameswaran, in *A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists*, says:

Charumati is a fitting helpmeet for him [the arch-Kshatriya,

**Yasodharman]**. She herself follows the Kshatriya code and is the embodiment of Kshatriya qualities of **self-confidence**, pride and courage as seen as early as her first appearance—at **the swyamvara**. Charumati scornfully rejects Mihiragula’s suit though she knows full well that the insulted Hun will wreak vengeance by proclaiming war . . . . (31)

**Parameswaran** points out that, as a faithful **follower of** the unwritten code of honour, Charumati responds enthusiastically to Yasodharman’s suit, which is couched in the language of a challenge (30).

Parameswaran also points out:

Saraswati, faced **by Narayana’s** lustful advances, fights to guard her maidenhead; by turn a tigress guarding her cub, **a** helpless supplicant invoking heaven, a cunning conspirator outwitting her captor. Later she becomes a Florence Nightingale—**Elizabeth Fry**—super suffragette, and all Magadh echoes with her subjects’ praises. . . . (34)

Parameswaran also says, “Toramana’s three queens are altogether too amicably disposed towards one another for credibility. . . .” (34).

### Chapter 3

#### Royal Women in Muslim India

The Muslim **monarchs** of India were known for their multiplicity of wives. The Mughal monarchs were also known for their love of splendour and **pleasure**. Some of them were virtual slaves of a favourite queen and let themselves be led by her. **Dasgupta's *Razia*, Jafa's *Nurjahan*, Murari's *Taj* and Khosla's *The Last Mughal* recreate Muslim India and portray several royal women.**

**Razia Sultan is the protagonist of Shehana Dasgupta's short historical novel *Razia: The People's Queen*. Chosen by her father, Sultan Iltutmish, to succeed him to the throne of the Sultanate of Delhi, she finds that the powerful Amirs—the counsellors who constitute an oligarchy—are ranged against her just because she is a woman. So she cleverly stoops to conquer: she lets her stepbrother Ruknuddin be installed as Sultan. As she expects, Ruknuddin proves his worthlessness within six months. Besides, his mother, Shah Turkan, in her lust for power and revenge, provokes the Amirs as well as the people. Identifying the opportune moment, Razia goes to the people for justice, resorting to the convention established by her father for redressal of grievances. Shah Turkan and Ruknuddin are seized, tried and put to death and Razia is installed as Sultan of Delhi. She rules for about four years, introducing beneficial schemes and laws which make the country and its people prosperous. However, the Amirs, who are mostly of Turkish**

origin, are provoked by her personal preference for Yakut, an Ethiopian slave, whom she elevates to the position of Amir. The Amirs conspire against her and incite a rebellion. Razia is imprisoned for some time by one of her own Amirs, namely Altunia. However, bending to circumstances, Altunia marries Razia and, together, they challenge her stepbrother Muiz-ud-din Bahram Shah, but are killed in the battle of Kaithal.

Razia is the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish by his first wife, who was the daughter of Qutbuddin Aibak, the founder of the Slave Dynasty. Razia is born to rule and Sultan Iltutmish wants her to succeed him as the ruler of Delhi. However, his favourite wife, Shah Turkan, who is a bewitching beauty, wants one of her two worthless sons to succeed Sultan Iltutmish, who, however, despises her two boys as lazy playboys. Shah Turkan tries in vain to persuade Sultan Iltutmish to change his opinion of her sons (Dasgupta, *Razia* 6-10).

Sultan Iltutmish is convinced that his heir should primarily be willing and able to fight. He observes that his daughter Razia, more than any of his other children, possesses the qualities of a good soldier, being fearless, tough and intelligent. So he trains her to lead the Sultanate's army one day. Razia is trained to fight on horseback and on foot, to manage her shield and heavy armour and at the same time be quick in her movements, so as to be able to ride away, if necessary. She is also taught how to direct her soldiers during a battle from the back of an elephant. She is trained to use various weapons, such as the spear, the sword and bow and arrows. Razia is also

taught how to plan, an attack on the enemy, studying the foe's weaknesses and the area of the battlefield. Sultan Iltutmish also teaches Razia that, in certain situations, diplomacy, and not war, should be resorted to. By the time Razia ascends the throne, she is prepared in every way to lead the most powerful institution in the land, namely the army (Dasgupta, *Razia* [46J-48]).

Razia is a princess with a difference. She does not dress like a girl or veil herself, but wears trousers and a coat, ties a turban around her head and carries a sword at her hip. She participates regularly in martial games and works on improving her skills as a warrior. She is good at sports and often goes hunting and riding. Bold and athletic, she is a skilful rider, both on horse and elephant. In short, Razia grows up more like a prince than a princess. She learns not merely to read and write, but also to argue and debate, so that she can hold her own among the nobles and counsellors in court. She also receives religious instruction and is familiar with the Koran. Thus Sultan Iltutmish trains Razia to become a ruler and a warrior (Dasgupta, *Razia* [17]-18).

However there is one important drawback in Sultan Iltutmish's plan. Razia is, despite all her talents and qualities, a woman. When Sultan Iltutmish dies in April 1236, and his decision that Razia will be his heir is made known to the Amirs—the powerful leaders and royal counsellors—most of them are not willing to take orders from a woman. Shah Turkan senses this and decides to exploit it for her own benefit. She has no intention of giving up her power and position upon her husband's death.

She has **some powerful Amirs at court as her allies. She sets out to enlist their support for her sons, particularly Ruknuddin (Dasgupta, *Razia* 11; 18-19).**

Razia, **sensing the growing opposition to her becoming queen, diplomatically proposes that her step-brother Ruknuddin be declared Sultan. Shah Turkan and the Amirs are surprised. On 30 April 1236, Ruknuddin is crowned Sultan of Delhi. However, Razia is determined to strike back. She is confident that everyone will soon see how weak Ruknuddin's character is (Dasgupta, *Razia* 19-20).**

Within **six months, the people begin to feel insecure because of the behaviour of Sultan Ruknuddin. His merrymaking and irresponsible behaviour empty the treasury soon. His mother, Shah Turkan, wields unlimited power and begins settling old scores ruthlessly. The mother and the son fear that the young Prince Qutbuddin, Sultan Iltutmish's son by another wife, can be a dangerous rival when he grows up and so order his murder. They also try to silence Razia, who begins to fear for her very life. So she decides to go directly to the people by using a technique devised by her father to enable aggrieved citizens to draw the Sultan's attention and obtain justice—wearing red clothes (Dasgupta, *Razia* 26-27).**

With the administration having broken down, and the Amirs defying the Sultan, Ruknuddin has to rush around to control several rebellions. While Sultan Ruknuddin is thus away from Delhi, in November 1236, Razia, cleverly selecting a Friday, appears before the huge crowd going for

prayers in the masque in the red clothes of a victim. Bluntly telling the people that Ruknuddin has killed her brother and wants to kill her too and that her step-mother is evil and wants to see her die, Razia appeals to the people for help out of respect for her dead father. The people are moved. They capture Shah Turkan and imprison her. When Ruknuddin rushes back to Delhi, the Amirs, who have switched their loyalty to Razia, capture him and bring him before her. Razia orders that her step-mother and step-brother be tried according to the law. Both are found guilty and are killed (Dasgupta, *Razia* 27-29).

Sultan. Razia is a kind ruler. She visits far-flung villages in the company of Court officials and personally acquaints herself with the way her people live, particularly their privations. She devises many plans for her people—repairing roads, setting up a postal system, building forts to guard the roads against thieves and dacoits. Such measures, she envisages, will not only ensure good governance, but also prove useful to merchants, farmers and craftsmen and enhance the business potential of villagers. She invites scholars from all over to study and teach at Nasiri College in Delhi, which was founded by her father, and make it a prestigious centre of learning. She also encourages poets and painters. She sets up schools and libraries (Dasgupta, *Razia* [39]-41).

Dasgupta highlights the uniqueness of Razia thus:

Razia Sultan did not become queen because she was the wife of a dead king. Nor did she become queen because she was the

mother of a young prince, on whose behalf she had to rule until he was old enough to be king himself. Instead she took the throne in her own right like a king would have done, and so she called herself Razia Sultan and not Sultana. She was her father's choice as heir and she was the people's choice as their ruler. In a way, she was a democratically elected queen and in this respect she was far ahead of her times. (*Razia* 42)

As her projects for the welfare of her people begin to change the atmosphere in the Sultanate, Razia, with admirable political acumen, makes her boldest decision of removing the tax on non-Muslims, as Dasgupta narrates:

The Sultan was very well aware of the fact that she and her noblemen—the Amirs, were foreigners **in** Delhi. Besides they were hugely outnumbered by the local population who were Hindus. She knew that **if** the Hindu kings stopped quarrelling amongst themselves and united, it would not take them long to get rid of the outsiders. Razia was a clever politician and understood that as a foreign ruler she could not survive long without the support of the Hindu population. If she was to keep her kingdom together, she needed their involvement and loyalty. She realized that she must somehow prove to the Hindus, that in her scheme of things they were her people as much as the Muslims were. And she thought the best way of doing so would be to treat Hindus and

Muslims as equal. (*Razia* 42-43)

The Amirs are shocked at Razia's proposal. To them the special tax on Hindus is not only an easy way of collecting money for the Sultanate but also a symbol of the power of the Muslim State and the Amirs. They point out that, in return for the tax, the Hindus are exempted from fighting for the Sultan. To their surprise and horror, Razia asks why Hindus should not fight for her (Dasgupta, *Razia* 43). Razia wins the argument, as Dasgupta narrates:

Razia explained to the nobles that she wanted the Hindus to identify themselves with the Sultanate and accept her as their ruler. She wished that Hindus and Muslims would participate in each other's lives and live harmoniously. This was only possible if her Hindu subjects were treated fairly, and Razia was convinced that the first step towards achieving that end was to abolish the tax on Hindus. (*Razia* 43)

Despite the opposition of the Amirs, Razia abolishes the tax on Hindus. Almost immediately the Hindus in the fortress town of Ranthambore rebel. Razia sends a force to recapture the fort, but orders it to return to Delhi after recapturing the fort. Razia still holds that, if she lets the Rajputs handle their affairs by themselves and treats them fairly, with neither force nor arrogance, they will remain within the Sultanate and also respect and support her. The Amirs are worried that, very soon, with the help of the people, she will hold all the power in her hand and regard it

unnecessary to consult the Amirs or even inform them of her plans. The Amirs perceive that power is gradually slipping away from their hands (Dasgupta, *Razia* 44-45).

Within a year of Razia's ascent to the throne, a small Muslim sect decides to challenge the supremacy of the main sect, namely the Sunnis. A thousand armed men attack worshippers gathered for Friday prayers in the Jama Masjid. Many people are killed, but Razia quickly brings the situation under control. Defiant Hindu kings sporadically rebel and, in some cases, Razia orders her soldiers to abandon some fortresses. The Amirs are • confused. Several Amirs join together in a rebellion, march to Delhi and lay siege to the city. Razia forms an alliance with loyal Amirs and crushes the rebellion, killing several of the rebel Amirs (Dasgupta, *Razia* 49-50).

In 1240, when Razia has been ruling for three years, she is still without rest because of the constant trouble given by the Amirs, the most recent of these being a rebellion by Malik Izzuddin Ayaz, the Governor of Lahore. Since she cannot afford to lose Lahore, she marches into the Punjab, chases Ayaz into a corner and forces him to surrender. But, instead of killing or imprisoning him, she sets him free because he has been taught a lesson. Almost immediately upon her return to Delhi with her tired army, Razia learns that Amir Altunia, the Governor of Bhatinda, has revolted and declared his independence from the Sultanate (Dasgupta, *Razia* [57]-58).

Razia is stunned by the news. She recollects the situation at the time of her father's death: most of the senior Amirs and even some of the junior

ones, despite Sultan Iltutmish's last wishes, were opposed to Razia succeeding him; very few of the Amirs supported her, because they did not care whether the ruler was a man or a woman; Altunia was one of these—a newcomer among the Amirs, a young Turkish nobleman, rather hotheaded and jealous by nature, but intelligent and ambitious, and expected to rise to great power one day; and, Altunia actually argued in her favour, hoping to persuade older Amirs to accept her as leader (Dasgupta, *Razia* 58-59).

Razia reviews the past few years to detect what could have gone wrong: upon ascending the throne, she began rewarding the Amirs who had helped her by appointing them ministers in her Court or governors of provinces; Altunia was loyal and reliable and she trusted him totally, valuing his friendship and advice; she even thought of marrying him, but brushed aside the idea, since she did not wish to divert her attention from the Sultanate; and, for his loyal support during the siege of Delhi, Razia appointed him Governor of Bhatinda, thinking that such a far away province should be entrusted only to an absolutely reliable Amir (Dasgupta, *Razia* 59-61).

Razia suspects that someone must have exploited the streak of jealousy in Altunia's nature to turn him against her; after Altunia had left for Bhatinda, she turned to other people for advice; one of them was Jamal-uddin Yakut, an Ethiopian slave in her Court, who caught her attention because of his calm and dependable nature and whom she appointed to the important post of 'Amir-i-AMiur', or head of the royal stables; many of the

other Amirs were infuriated because the post was usually occupied by an **Amir of Turkish** blood; Yakut not only looked after her horses, but also advised her on other matters of state, while riding alongside her or fighting beside her; and, Yakut was constantly in Razia's company, much more than any other Amir (Dasgupta, *Razia* 61-62).

Amirs like Balban and Aitigin have seized the opportunity provided by Razia's careless behaviour and Altunia's jealous nature to carry out their plan to get rid of her. They have incited Altunia's jealousy by reporting to him her scandalous behaviour with Yakut and they have promised to share power with him after Razia is toppled. Altunia has fallen into their trap. Working all this out cleverly, Razia decides to face Altunia's rebellion and the larger conspiracy. She sends for Yakut and tells him of her decision. Yakut has his own misgivings about the proposed campaign, but his loyalty is so great that he begins preparations for the war (Dasgupta, *Razia* 62-63).

Razia's army sets out in April 1240. It meets Altunia's army near Bhatinda in Punjab. Altunia cleverly isolates Yakut. When Yakut dies in battle, his soldiers surrender to Altunia. Razia herself is captured and taken to Bhatinda fort. Altunia sends word of his victory to Delhi. The Amirs are overjoyed, and immediately appoint Razia's brother, Muiz-ud-din Bahram Shah, as her successor, since he is fit to be a puppet of the Amirs, the most powerful of whom is now Aitigin and who becomes the Sultan's deputy. The Amirs just forget Altunia. Meanwhile, the indomitable Razia starts thinking of escaping, gathering her army and taking revenge on her enemies.

Aeitigin's increased demands for power and recognition irk the other Amirs as well as the Sultan. One day he is violently stabbed to death by assassins. Now Altunia perceives that he has been used and fooled by Aeitigin and Balban. He is determined to take revenge on the Amirs who cheated him. Since Altunia and Razia have a common goal now, they agree to unite. They even fall in love again and decide to get married (Dasgupta, *Razia* 63-70).

After their marriage, Altunia and Razia turn their attention to reconquering Delhi. The Sultan and his advisers decide that, since Razia is still respected in Delhi, she should never be allowed to reach the city, but should be met outside Delhi. In October 1240, Razia's army and the Sultan's meet at a place named Kaithal. The Sultan's army is larger and better equipped. Altunia dies fighting bravely. What happened to Razia after Altunia's death is a mystery because there are two versions of it. According to one, she was struck by an arrow and died a hero on the battlefield. According to the other, she fled from the battlefield into the countryside. While she was sleeping in exhaustion, a peasant, coveting her jewels, killed her and buried her in the fields. All that can be ascertained is that she died on 13 October 1240 (Dasgupta, *Razia* 70-72).

Jafa's *Nurjahan* teems with royal women. There are so many of them that it may well be called a harem novel. In fact, much of the story is located in the royal harem. Though there are so many women in the novel, it is preeminently the story of Nurjahan, the last, and favourite queen of

Emperor **Jehangir** and the enormous power that she wielded over the Mughal Empire. Ellison **Banks Findly**, in “Nur **Jahan**: A Woman’s Power in a Mughal Court,” says:

Jahangir was increasingly under the influence of alcohol and opium, and Mihmonisa... quickly took control of the channels of decision and influence.... Nur Jahan was soon established as the central figure of consequence in a powerful configuration of role. . . . (14)

Findly further says,

The extent of her [**Nurjahan’s**] control... has been given in a famous passage from **the Iqbalnama**: “Day by day her influence and dignity increased.... No grant of lands was **conferred** upon any woman except under her seal.... Sometimes she would sit in the balcony of her palace, while the nobles would present themselves, and listen to her dictates. Coin was struck in her name.... On all *Jarmans* also receiving the Imperial, signature, the name of Nur **Jahan**, the Queen **Begam**,’ was jointly attached. The uses, and perhaps abuses, of power by Nur Jahan were legendary and appeared in every arena in which she lived and worked... (14)

Such a powerful woman is the centre of the narrative of **Jafa’s Nurjahan**. **The novel** also portrays Nurjahan’s niece Aijumand, the wife of **Khurram**, who will succeed Jehangir as Mughal Emperor, **Nurjahan’s** own

**daughter Ladli and several other royal women.**

**Bilquis Begum leads her step-son, Prince Salim, into her garden, where Mehninnisa is sitting after her playmates have gone away. He notices Mehrunnisa and remarks on her rare beauty. Bilquis Begum has the only pair of fantailed pigeons in Hindustan. They have been smuggled out of Basra by Malik Masud because she longed for them. Now, however, Salim wants them for his aviary. Bilquis Begum gives them to him, but wants him to promise to give her the first fledgelings hatched from, the pair. Salim, grabs the pigeons from their cage. When he is offered pomegranate juice, looking for someone to hold the pigeons, he beckons Mehrunnisa. As her hand touches his, her long slender fingers tremble and an involuntary smile flashes on her lips. While he and Bilquis Begum, are drinking their sherbet, one of the rare pigeons escapes from Mehrunnisa's hands. Salim asks her how it escaped. Mehrunnisa lets the other pigeon also escape and says that that was how the first one escaped (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [11]-13).**

**What follows is epiphanic, as Jafa describes:**

**Taking a step towards her, Salim raised her chin with a finger and after a quick appraisal asked, "Your name?"**

**A moment passed. Her mouth trembled, and a flash spread from her creamy throat to her cheeks and brow. "Mehrunnisa," she replied in a curiously husky voice.**

**Nobody spoke. A feeling that they were gazing dangerously into the future had fallen on them all. A sense of impending**

events had entered that garden filled with women of Persian Wood. Something stirred at the back of Bilquis Begum's mind, some tale Asmat [Mehrunnisa's mother] had told of Mehrannisa lying unharmed under a cobra's hood. {*Nurjahan* 13)

A sudden breeze blows her veil off her shoulder. With a quick impatient gesture, she catches it and flings it back over her head. Salim is charmed and wonders what colour her eyes are. Bilquis Begum breaks the spell binding her profligate step-son and her seventeen-year-old kinswoman by telling him that she is Ghias Beg's daughter and her kinswoman. The announcement implies that Mehrunnisa is no harem slave girl for casual dalliance. However, Salim has, gazed at Mehrunnisa too long ever to forget her face (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 13-14).

Bilquis Begum is particular that Mehrunnisa should charm Salim by her singing that evening and presents her with an emerald and pearl necklace, ear-rings and ring. Mehrunnisa has already heard of Salim's interest in her from his favourite sister Arambanu Begum, but she is not quite sure of where it will lead and so she does not tell Bilquis Begum of it (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 19). Bilquis Begum tells Mehrunnisa:

“I'm going to talk very frankly with you, Mehrunnisa. My volatile step-son will one day control the destiny of this vast empire. Many will try to manipulate him for questionable ends, but perhaps you, as his consort, could prevent all that, and mould him into a perfect sovereign.” (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 19)

Bilquis Begum adds: “Allah has endowed you with the intellect and strength of soul required in queens.. .. It will mean so much to so many and everything to Salim” (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 19-20).

Mehrunnisa sings a song implying that she is surrendering her heart to Salim. Akbar appreciates her singing greatly. She is chosen to receive the prize. Empress Jodh Bai remonstrates by her looks that Salim’s appreciation of Mehrunnisa’s singing is too exuberant, but he pays no attention to her. During the banquet that follows, Jodh Bai watches Salim talking animatedly to Mehrunnisa (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 23-24).

Jodh Bai seeks out her nephew Raja Maan Singh of Amber, one of Akbar’s ministers. She wants him to arrange a match for Mehrunnisa. She informs him that, according to Mehrunnisa’s horoscope, which was cast thrice by the High Priest of Amber, the foremost astrologer in the country, Mehrunnisa shall rule undoubted queen over Hindustan one day and his nephew Khusro’s star will wane when she rises to power. The astrological prediction convinces him and he decides to act. He suggests sending Salim away for a while, perhaps to conduct the campaign in Mewar. Empress Jodh Bai promises that it will be arranged (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [24]-28).

Ghias Beg tells his son Asaf that Prince Salim will leave Agra soon. At breakfast, when the talk turns to Salim, Mehrunnisa hastens to defend him. Ghias Beg notices Mehrunnisa’s changing colour and trembling fingers. He has already taken note of the transparency of her skin, the dreamy look in her eyes and her softening contours and felt disturbed by her

beauty. After breakfast, **Asmat** takes **Ghias** Beg aside and shows **him** a casket delivered that morning for Mehrunnisa. It contains ruby studs. Asmat says that Sherrif Khan gave them to the husband of their maid **Jamila** and insisted that the gift be delivered to Mehrunnisa. Ghias Beg traces **the** rubies to Salim. Now he understands many things. Asmat is averse **to** a match between Salim and Mehrunnisa, which she senses as an intrigue on the part of the Persian Sultana and as potentially disastrous **for** Mehrunnisa. Ghias Beg decides to arrange a speedy marriage for Mehrunnisa so **that** this nonsense will be forgotten (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [29] -34).

Mehrunnisa is alone at home. One of Salim's carrier pigeons arrives with a message for her. Salim has asked her to come to **the Rooh Afzah** garden at sunset that day. Mehrunnisa is **confused by anxieties regarding her reputation and the honour of her family. But the pull of Salim's summon is irresistible. As she hurries downstairs, she runs into her brother Asaf, who is disturbed by his sister's recent changed behaviour. She manages to send him away. Trying to formulate some scheme whereby she can meet Salim without causing a scandal, she seeks the help of her nurse Dil Aram and asks her to go with her. Dil Aram says that she has always told her that Sultan Salim is her destiny and that it is written in the stars that she will be a great queen. Since Dil Aram is reputed to be a wise woman gifted with the powers of prophecy, her words thrill Mehrunnisa and she spends the rest of the day in visions of future splendour** (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 35-

Salim wants his friend Sherrif Khan to paint a picture of his beloved without seeing her and only from his description and describes her thus:

“She has a laughing face, a matchless form. Her nose is small, exquisitely shaped, her lips perfect, rose-tinted. Her eyebrows arch like taut bows over her lotus lids. How shall I describe her eyes? Those long large eyes have a strange mesmeric power, though it’s impossible to know their real colour. They have neither the hard sparkle of black eyes nor the dreamy limpidness of blue. Their indeterminate colour lends them to all forms of seduction\_\_\_ There is a mysterious, intriguing quality about that girl...(Jafa, *Nurjahan* [40])

The Shahenshah and Salim, accompanied by a host of nobles, go out on a hunt. Salim’s friend Sher Afghan has been purloined by the Emperor to hunt with him. Salim goes with his friends. Seeing a litter of young tiger cubs, Salim impulsively picks up two of the cubs for his menagerie, disregarding his companions’ warning.. As he does so, the tigress pounces on him with a mighty roar. Sher Afghan rides through the foliage and, with a single stroke of his scimitar, chops the beast’s head off. Salim draws off a huge ruby ring engraved with his name and slides it on Sher Afghan’s finger. He is prepared to give Sher Afghan anything he asks for. When Akbar learns of Salim’s near fatal adventure, he showers favours on Sher Afghan including the Jagir of Burdwan in Bengal and bids him demand any boon (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 41-48).

At sunset, entering the **Rooh Afzah** garden by the postern gate with her nurse Dil Aram, Mehrunnisa is delighted to see Salim standing there with outstretched arms. She runs into his arms, forgetting all **decorum**, filled with longings. They kiss, trembling and breathless. He says that he asked her to come because he is leaving for Mewar and they may not see each other for months. He is loathe to leave her without a formal betrothal (Jafa, *Nurjahan 50-51*).

Salim longs to meet Mehrunnisa again before leaving Agra for Mewar. So he **approaches Bilquis** Begum. After some hesitation on account of his chief wife Shah Begum, Bilquis Begum asks him to **go to Sikandra** early next morning to offer his devotions at the saint's tomb and she says that .Mehrunnisa will meet him there. Salim goes to **Sikandra** to the shrine of the tomb of **Jamal-u-din** Chisti. Mehrunnisa is waiting for him there. Together, they offer flowers and **prayers at the tomb of the saint. Mehrunnisa is miserable. Salim gives her an amulet from his arm. It is a miraculous talisman presented to him long ago by Sheik Salim Chisti. If Mehrunnisa is in trouble and needs him, she is to send it to his foster-brother SherrifKhan, who will convey it to him and he will come immediately. Salim leaves. Mehrunnisa stays back to observe some rituals (Jafa, Nurjahan 52-56).**

■ ‘ As Mehrunnisa travels back with her nurse Dil Aram by palki, a gang of masked robbers waylay the party. Suddenly a horseman arrives on the scene, scatters the robbers and saves Mehrunnisa. Seeing her fairy face and hearing her sweet voice, the horseman loses his heart to her. The horseman

discovers that the fairy in the **paiki** is Mehrunnisa **Khannum**, the daughter of Mirza **Ghias** Beg (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 57-58).

**Sher** Afghan seeks the advice of Raja **Maan** Singh. **Sher** Afghan requests the Amber Raja to speak to Ghias Beg, whose daughter Mehrunnisa he wishes **to** marry. The Amber Raja says that, using the boon granted him by the **Shahenshah** for saving Salim's life **from** the tigress, he may, if he moves swiftly, attain his heart's desire. Sher Afghan is pleased and pledges his sword and his life to the Amber Raja (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [59]-62).

Since Sher Afghan has neither kith nor kin, the Amber Raja accompanies him to Ghias Beg's house to seek the hand of Mehrunnisa. When told that the Amber Raja has brought her betrothal gifts on behalf of Sher Afghan, Mehrunnisa protests that she should have been consulted. Ghias Beg bluntly tells her that the marriage has been commanded by the Shahenshah. Mehrunnisa knows that the Shahenshah cannot be disobeyed, but, she invokes the Prophet's law against forcing her into a marriage. She remembers Salim's amulet. Summoning Dil Aram, she asks her to convey it to **Sherrif** Khan. Dil Aram tells her not to give up hope of marrying Salim, since her prophecy cannot be wrong (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 62-64).

Upon receiving the amulet, Salim abandons everything and rides in fierce haste to Agra. Salim swears that Mehrunnisa will not wed Sher Afghan while he lives. Thinking seriously, he gives some instructions to Sherrif Khan, to be carried out by his wife. According to these instructions,

Laila spirits Mehrunnisa out of her father's house and, transporting her by a barge, slips her into Salim's audience chamber. Mehrunnisa, unable to believe her eyes, runs into Salim's arms. There is a bustle before Salim's palace because of his unexpected return. Akbar enters Salim's room and finds the lovers in a tight embrace. Frightened by the fuy in the Shahenshah's face, Mehrunnisa casts herself violently against Salim's breast and she slides down in a dead faint (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 64-65).

The next morning, Mehrunnisa faces the Shahenshah unperturbed, emboldened by Salim's assurances. Akbar tells her that if she refuses to marry Sher Afghan, her family will be banished. Seeing that she is really left with no choice, Mehrunnisa capitulates (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 66).

The dying Akbar commands that Salim be bidden to come to receive Ms Sword of State as the undoubted heir to the throne of Hindustan. Salim, at his father's command, girds the Sword of State round his waist and puts on Ms head his father's turban, with the famous Kohinoor diamond on it. Akbar dies in Salim's arms. All eyes now turn to Salim, master of all Hindustan (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 88-90).

Watched by the Mughal Begums and flanked by Ms sons, Salim ascends the Timurid Mughal throne as Badshah Jehangir. For a moment Asaf remembers his sister Mehrunnisa and .that, but for Akbar, she would have been sitting with the Mughal Begums now (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [91]-92).

Jehangir is beset by problems all round. But he has the able Ghias Beg and his sons to support and advise him. So the problems can be overcome

by and by. Yet he is aware of a restlessness within, a search for deeper fulfilment. Months later, Sher Afghan, Chief of Burdwan, comes to pay homage and reminds Jehangir of the hauntingly beautiful face of Mehrunnisa, his lost love, and he begins to understand the obscure longing that has been tormenting him day and night. Jehangir still cannot get over his love for Mehrunnisa: “His [Jehangir’s] mind became engrossed with plans. There must be some way of reclaiming Mehrunnisa. He would set Meer Sudder jahan to examine the laws of Islam, he decided” (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 93-96).

Sherrif Khan gasps when Emperor Jehangir tells him that he wants Sher Afghan to divorce Mehrunnisa. He says that, if the suggestion were made to Sher Afghan, he would be terribly offended. Jehangir cannot risk alienating Sher Afghan, because he is the undoubted hero of a group of Afghan chiefs and, after Khusro’s revolt, the kingdom cannot bear an Afghan uprising. At the same time, he cannot begin his reign by repudiating his father’s firman granting Sher Afghan the jagir of Burdwan (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [102]). So he tells Sherrif Khan his plan:

‘That’s why I am sending you as my envoy to Bengal. Cultivate Sher Afghan, and at the appropriate moment suggest the divorce on the ground that Mehrunnisa has not home him any male heir. You can offer Sher the choice of espousing a number of lovely young noble women, whom I shall endower generously. But I want no scandal or ill-will resulting from this. You will be

discreet and **tactful**, as you value my honour and friendship,  
**Sherrif.**” (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [ 102]-03)

Jehangir reveals that he has recalled Raja Maan Singh from Bengal and appointed Qutub-ud-Din Koka Governor of Bengal in his place. Sherrif may rely on his help but is not to disclose the actual purpose of his visit to anyone. Sherrif points out that Sher Afghan will not easily yield what Jehangir covets in deference to talks and arguments and negotiations but will have to be intimidated somehow. Jehangir feels no great regret for his late Empress Shah Begum, the Princess of Amber, who swallowed a fatal dose of opium upon hearing of her son’s revolt. He pleads that none of his queens or concubines can be a true companion to him and so he feels utterly lonely. He declares that, with Mehrunnisa by his side, he can achieve anything because she shares his dreams and aspirations and has the strength of soul that his consorts lack. Sherrif suggests sending Asaf, Mehrunnisa’s brother, but Jehangir says that Asaf is to know nothing of it at all Sherrif suggests murdering Sher Afghan, but Jehangir recalls that Sher Afghan saved his life. Sherrif suggests sending Sher Afghan to Mewar against the Rana, but Jehangir says that the subterfuge will be too easily perceived. He reiterates that divorce is allowed under Islamic law and a divorced lady is free to wed anyone. Finally Sherrif consents to go on the errand (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 104-06).

Sherrif goes to Bengal under the pretext of attending the wedding of Qutub-ud-Din’s daughter Benazzir, whose mother Sakina Begum is related

to him. After the wedding, Sherrif Khan is in no hurry to go back to Agra. His cautious queries have drawn an outraged oath from Sher Afghan and he has realised that Sher Afghan cannot be induced to divorce his wife. That night, however, Qutub-ud-Din says that his huntsmen have sighted a rhinoceros close by and that he proposes to take Sherrif Khan and Sher Afghan on a rhino hunt. - The hunting party moves. The rhinoceros is sighted and started. While his friends hide from the charging rhinoceros, Sher Afghan bravely faces it and calls for a javelin. Qutub-ud-Din's personal javelin is handed to him and he spears the charging beast expertly. But the shaft snaps and Sher Afghan is thrown off his horse. As Sher Afghan rises, Sherrif Khan notices that none of the others has made a single move to stop the rhinoceros, which is preparing to maul Sher Afghan. Raising his musket, Sherrif Khan shoots the beast through the eye and it dies. Sher Afghan charges Qutub-ud-Din with treachery. Seeing the Governor's men surrounding them, he realises that he has been trapped. They fight. Sher Afghan kills Qutub-ud-Din. The Governor's men fall on Sher Afghan and kill him (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [107]-!5).

When, after months of weary travel, Mehrunnisa reaches Agra, her brother Ibrahim arrives with the news that Sherrif has received a written command from the Badshah to convey Mehrunnisa with her child and nurse to the Mughal palace. This is quite irregular, but none dare question the Badshah's command. Mehrunnisa gasps and says that there must be some mistake. But Ibrahim clarifies that the order explicitly says that she must be

conveyed to Salima Begum's Palace where Mehrunnisa's mother is waiting to receive her (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 117-18).

Mehrunnisa expects her impetuous lover to receive her immediately. But days, weeks and months pass without a private audience. After waiting for about a year, she is piqued at his neglect. She is not aware of how eagerly his eyes seek her or how sternly he holds himself in rein or how he wishes to end her suffering. She is given an apartment of her own in the zenana, where she is permitted to receive members of her family, but she is not allowed to leave the Palace, Salima Begum ignores her pleas for removal to her father's house (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 118-19).

**Mehrunnisa's** bosom friend Laila hints that it is for her sake that the Radshah continues to favour her family. When she is not convinced, Laila reveals that her husband Sherrif Khan went to Bengal only to bring about Sher Afghan's death, as he himself told her. Mehrunnisa is shaken and distraught. Laila seems to take it for granted that Mehrunnisa is still in love with her Salim and has never loved her husband Sher Afghan (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 119-20).

Jehangir's sister Arambanu Begum visits Mehrunnisa and tells her that her brother is still in love with her. She says that all Agra knows that she will not remain a widow for long. She reports that his health has deteriorated, his restlessness is increasing, making him ill-tempered, that his passion for hunting has grown to an unnatural extent and that he is again drinking to excess. She thinks that boredom and loneliness are driving him

to excess and that her brother feels that there is no one to share his ideas, no one he can confide in and no one who understands him. Finally she pleads for her brother, who is suffering from the pangs of unrequited love (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 120-22).

Salima Begum insists on Mehrunnisa visiting her almost daily. Basking in her kindness, Mehrunnisa wonders if she can persuade her to help her escape from her gilded captivity, since she knows that she is being spoken of in the zenana as the woman whom the Badshah keeps hidden away. Salima Begum is aware of Mehrunnisa's unhappiness and depression. She tells the young widow of her own first widowhood, when Bairam Khan was killed, and of how her aunt Hamida Begum had her brought to Court and wedded to her son Akbar, when the prescribed period of mourning was over (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [123]-25).

Salima Begum makes it a policy to have Mehrunnisa present whenever her step-son Jehangir visits her. One evening, while Salima Begum, is in her garden with a bevy of noble women, including Mehrunnisa, Jehangir comes there. He takes Mehrunnisa aside. Grasping her ruthlessly by the shoulder, he says that Ms palace awaits its mistress, Hindustan its queen. (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 126-28).

That night, in her own chamber, Mehrunnisa's behaviour is significant, as Jafa records it: ■.

she stood a long while beside her sleeping daughter. She was tormented afresh by memories of her dead husband, and then all

' unbidden, the Emperor's face as he had stood before her that evening rose up to drive away every other memory' from her mind.

Carrying the single candlestick to her writing desk, Mehrunnisa sank down on the carpet. And drawing out a sheet of parchment, she dipped her quill into the ink pot and wrote:

“O faithless heart,  
would you betray me again?” (*Nurjahan* 128)

It is now four years since Sher Afghan died. Meeting her alone, Jehangir demands an answer to his love petitions. At least he demands a reason for her refusal. At last she reveals her belief that Jehangir had her husband murdered. He does not directly deny her accusation, but says he mourned Sher Afghan who had saved his life, cursed Qutub-ud-Din who had him murdered and put to death the men who treacherously killed her husband. Now he pleads with her. At last Mehrunnisa consents (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [129]-33).

' Despite Mehrunnisa's request, Jehangir makes the wedding a lavish affair. Mehrunnisa surrenders herself to the man she cannot but love and, in so doing, gains total mastery over his heart. The next morning he names her Nurjahan, Light of the World. Her long reign has begun (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 136).

Ladli wonders at her mother's energy, efficiency, tact and influence. The spell of Nurjahan's magic lies over everyone and everything. She presides over most affairs of State, patronises jewellers, artists, craftsmen,

poets and writers, helps **all** women supplicants, arranges the education of indigent noblemen's daughters, renovates palaces and forts and dictates the fashion in women's dress (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 141-42). Ladli hears many whispers about her mother's strange, mesmeric hold over the Emperor. Ladli herself feels lonely. Her father is dead and she has lost her mother to the Emperor (Jafa, *Nurjahan* i 41 -43).

At the annual Royal Meena Bazaar in Lahore, Aijumand, beautiful grand-daughter of Ghias Beg, selects a jade wine cup as an appropriate gift for her grandfather. She throws her purse to the merchant and reaches for the cup. Just then Khurram, Jehangir's third son, grasps it. Apologising for his discourtesy, Khurram says that though they both desire the cup, she may keep it. Agitated, Aijumand says that he may have it since she only wanted it as a gift for her grandfather. Khurram drinks in her rare beauty and asks her who her grandfather is. But Arjumand has already fled without the cup as **well** as her purse. The merchant calls after her. Khurram takes the cup from him saying that he will see that she gets it. Seeing her talking to Ladli, he approaches them, but Aijumand bolts. He learns from Ladli that the girl is Asaf's eldest daughter Aijumand. Thanking Ladli, Khurram follows Arjumand and catches up with her on the terrace and hands her the cup. As she takes the cup from him, her pulse beat quickens. They stand motionless for a long time, their glances interlocked. Jehangir watches their tryst and points it out to Nurjahan, who smiles and changes the subject, though her mind is already busy with plans. Ladli too observes the tryst and sadly

thinks that Khurram will remain only another step-brother (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 146-48).

Nurjahan is keen on the betrothal of Arjumand to Khurram because she has her own plans for Ladli. She wants the Emperor's eldest son Khusro to wed Ladli, but he will not bow to her will. It has been reported to her that Ms reaction to her hinting and cajoling has been to declare that he will not turn into one of her puppets and that he has some hope of escaping from the Emperor's prison, but Nurjahan will imprison his mind and soul (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 152).

Emperor Jehangir orders Prince Khurram to subdue the never-subdued Rana of Mewar. So Khurram camps under the shadow of the Rana's city of Chittor when the rains begin. Khurram thinks that Rana Amar Singh is foolish in refusing to accept the hegemony of the Mughals and to join the mainstream of Hindustan politics. He feels that once Mewar is subdued, its gallantry and talent can be put to creative use. His wife Aijumand, however, champions the Rana's cause and argues that the Mughals have no right to force the Rajputs into a treaty unwillingly when they have been sovereign princes for centuries. Khurram is surprised at Arjumand's keen political perception until he remembers that she is the daughter of one of the most gifted ministers of the realm and the grand-daughter of Ghias Beg, the sagacious and liberal statesman (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [153]).

Feeling cooped up in the commanding hill fortress of Kumbhalgadh and lonely because her husband, like a true warrior, is away on military

affairs, Arjumand decides to go on a picnic in a grove beside a lake in the emerald and amber valley spread below the hill. While she is enjoying herself beside the lake, Mewar soldiers surprise her with drawn swords. Though frightened, Aijumand resolves not to show it. She taunts the soldiers with making war on women, which is against Rajput tradition. The leader assures her that they mean her no harm, but must take her captive and take her to the Rana, who will fix her ransom with Prince Khurram. He orders her companion Satiunnisa Khannum to blindfold her mistress and forces them to enter a palanquin (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 154-56).

As she is being carried away in the palanquin, Arjumand is no longer afraid. She prefers to regard it as an adventure. She is sure that the Rajputs will do nothing to her. In fact she admires the courage of the Rajput soldiers. After hours of slow, jolting travel, they enter a fortress and Arjumand is taken to the secret retreat of Rana Amar Singh. When the Rana hears the commander's tale, he rages against him because it has been the Rajput tradition for centuries to consign their women to flames and honour the wives and daughters of every other race. He declares that the commander's infamous deed will put the mark of shame on his own forehead. The Rana sends for his heir Karan Singh. When Karan Singh arrives, Aijumand requests the Rana to arrange for her immediate return to Kumbhalgadh. Karan Singh apologises to her for the folly of the Rajput men and advises against a journey by night through the jungle. The next morning, with beating drums and flying banners, Karan Singh escorts

Aijumand to Kumbhalgadh. Khurram, who has just returned from Chittor, receives him outside the fort. Karan Singh and Khurram become soul-brothers and begin an incredible friendship (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 156-58).

Nurjahan approves of all that Khurram has done in the Mewar campaign. Khurram points out that the conditions put forward by Mewar for a treaty show that they are utterly disinterested in personal gain. Nurjahan says that the Badshah will agree to everything that Mewar wants, except the return of Chittor, because the Rana cannot be allowed to fortify it or even to reoccupy it. Nurjahan says that he must discuss the terms of the treaty with Ms father. Khurram replies that they can easily arrange everything without troubling him. It is implied that she cannot, for all his valour and military genius, allow Khurram to make treaties (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 160-62).

Arjumand is amazed at the incredible friendship between Nurjahan and Khurram's mother Queen Jagat Gossain, because she herself is so jealous that she cannot abide the sight of Khurram's other wife Kandhari Begum. But Arjumand does not know that Bilquis Begum had trained Nurjahan carefully for this very role. As a result there is a mesmeric fascination about Nurjahan which always affects the people around her. She invariably treats the Emperor's other three wives with charming deference, especially Jagat Gossain, who is the mother of two sons. Going on a hunting expedition, Nurjahan amazes everyone, including the English Ambassador, by her excellent marksmanship with a gun (Jafa, *Nurjahan*

169-71).

Jehangir is now and then assailed by doubts as to whether Nurjahan secretly regrets having married him. She assures him that her regret is only for those years spent away from him. He still longs to be alone with her. He says that only she revealed the meaning of marriage to him and that, when she is not by his side, he knows neither rest, nor joy, nor repose (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 172-74).

During the celebration of Emperor Jehangir's fiftieth birthday, Salima Begum reflects on her step-son, as Jafa records:

He hasn't changed, thought Salima, or matured. He's still a charming prince, but Akbar Shah's premonitions have been amply justified. All his life Salim had evaded responsibility, and seldom exerted himself on anyone's behalf. It is **Nurjahan** who rules while **he** escapes from reality, and diverts himself in his private world of gardens and paintings and opium and wine. But Nurjahan had her good points... Besides her breathtaking beauty, gaiety and wit, she possessed iron self-control and calm good sense. She had curbed Salim's drinking, and discouraged Ms swift, cruel reprisals against recalcitrant vassals. She cared for him with utter devotion and a tender solicitude. What more could anyone expect? ... (*Nurjahan* 181)

Khurram is eager to accept the command of the Mughal forces in Khandesh in the Deccan, but he has a few requests to make. He requests

that Crown Prince Khusro should lead the Mughal army and he will be content to be second-in-command. Jehangir consults Nurjahan. She is afraid to let Khusro, Khurram, and Mahabat Khan, the three most dangerous men in Hindustan, congregate in the Deccan. At the same time, however, it is desirable to keep Khurram far away from the Court. Thinking deeply and choosing her words carefully, Nurjahan approves of the idea from Khurram (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 200-02).

Ghias Beg fears the consequences of this move and reprimands Nurjahan for again interfering with kismet. She pleads that she has done her best to carry the burden of government without any thought of leisure, comfort or persona! whim. She is now annoyed and defiant. Ghias Beg perceives that because of Jehangir's recurrent illness and his own retirement after his wife Asmat's death, she has been ruling Hindustan with only her brother Asaf to aid her (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [203]).

Ghias Beg says that a word from her would have prevented the Emperor from sending Khusro with Khurram, who has subsequently murdered the Crown Prince in Burhanpur by slow poisoning. He charges her with forcing her kinsmen into rival camps though he has taught his children and grandchildren to live in amity because no one can destroy the power of a united house. She says that Khusro died of a fever and that Ms granddaughter Aijumand would never have countenanced such a crime as he alleges. Ghias Beg retorts that Khurram, unlike his father, makes his own decisions and will never succumb to advice or interference from any

woman. He reveals that Mirza Abdul Rahim has written from Burhanpur that the truth is so frightful that no one can speak about it. Nurjahan despairs of convincing her father that she did not **bargain for** Khusro's death (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 204-05).

Remembering why she has come to her father's house **for** the first time since her mother's death four months ago, Nurjahan says that she has great hopes of Prince **Sheryar**, whom Ladli has married. She wants her brother **Asaf** to be sent to the Persian Court as the envoy of the **Mughals**. **Ghias** Beg opposes the idea because he fears that a time may come when she may have to depend upon the friendship and goodwill of her brother for her **own** safety. **Nurjahan** retorts that **Khurram's** current insolent behaviour may endanger her brother's position. Ghias Beg ridicules her because her schemes are based on **Ladli's** marriage to Sheryar. He asserts that **Perveiz, and not Khurram, is Jehangir's heir right now and enjoys the required support. He advises her again to leave the disposition of empires to destiny. Nurjahan protests that her chief concern is the Emperor's health and well-being, that she will not allow Khurram to defy the Badshah and that her political activities are logical steps which will preserve the Mughal Empire and not actions emanating from her whims, hatred or delusion (Jafa, Nurjahan 205-08).**

**Bearing in mind the intelligence that Khurram will be returning soon, Nurjahan sends for her son-in-law Sheryar, and advises him pointedly:**

**"You are no longer a child. You must work hard to secure the**

friendship and goodwill of the amirs and rayaya. Be courteous, Sheryar, and weigh your words carefully before speaking, for wise words will secure loyal adherents for you, while frivolous speech can only alienate people.” (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 211)

After the death of Ghias Beg, distrust raises its head between Nurjahan and her brother Asaf, who is now the Grand Vezzir. He is unyielding and domineering and she foresees many struggles for supremacy between them. She wonders if the trouble between them is due to the evasive, arrogant attitude of Khurram, to whom Asaf is utterly devoted (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [213]).

Jehangir complains that, after all these years of perfect harmony with Khurram, he is suddenly facing disagreements with him. Jehangir feels that everything can be sorted out if Khurram comes to Agra, but he refuses to leave Burhanpur. Nurjahan mentions that Khurram is long overdue in Agra. Asaf spells out Khurram’s conditions. Seeing through Khurram’s design, Nurjahan cunningly asks if Khurram prefers to consign his family to the care of Rana Karan Singh rather than to the care of Ms own father. Asaf is astounded at her astuteness. Jehangir orders a firman to be issued ordering Khurram to dispatch all the Mughal forces under his command back to Agra. Asaf withdraws in defeat (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [211]-16). Khurram has to seek sanctuary in Mewar (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [221])

Realising the futility of his struggle against the Mughal might, and capitulating to Arjumand’s pleas, Khurram reluctantly writes to Jehangir

begging forgiveness and offering to present himself at Court. Khurram ,, takes stock of his predicament as he awaits **his** father's response to his capitulation. He is safe only because **of Rana** Karan Singh (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [221]-22).

While Khurram and all the members of his family are participating **in** the Holi celebrations in the **Rana's** palace, a Bhil arrives with a message. The message says that **Mahabat Khan** has crossed the frontiers of Mewar at the head of six **thousand** Rajput horsemen, riding under a flag of truce. The Rajputs present girdle, up for war. Karan Singh **speaks to** Khurram earnestly, urging the importance of making a friend of Mahabat **Khan**. Khurram decides to receive Mahabat Khan in peace. His brain seethes with schemes depending upon **Mahabat Khan supporting his cause** (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 227-28).

**At Khurram's invitation, Mahabat Khan spells out the Emperor's terms:**

**“The Badshah commands the surrender of your fortresses in Rohtas and Asir, and the immediate attendance at Court of your sons Prince Dara and Prince Aurangzeb, to be educated under the personal supervision of their grandfather. Their grand-uncle Ibrahim Khan Fatehjung has been appointed ataliq. In his magnanimous generosity, the Badshah has decreed that you are to receive your former allowances again, and the governorship of Balochpur.”** (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 230)

Hearing a smothered moan from the latticed queens' gallery,

Khurram guessed that Arjumand had cried involuntarily at the prospect of parting from her sons. He could plainly see his stepmother's hand in this. Arjumand would find this intolerable. But submit he must, lest he imperil his hosts. He tried to reassure himself: whatever be her faults, Begum Nurjahan was neither inhuman, nor callous, and towards children he had always found her curiously indulgent. And Khurram felt that their grand-uncle's presence was meant to reassure Arjumand of her children's safety on the long road to Agra. .

After alternately threatening and beseeching him for three years, she had at last sent Mahabat to subdue him. Someday, Khurram resolved, he would annihilate his step-mother. (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 231)

After a long pause Khurram calmly says that he bows to the Badshah's decree (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 231).

As the Mughal camp on the way to Kabul is struck, Mahabat Khan tells Jehangir to return to Lahore under his escort. When Mahabat Khan's soldiers draw their swords, Emperor Jehangir realises that he is a prisoner in his own camp (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 240-41).

Upon learning of the capture of the Emperor, Nurjahan is for delivering him immediately. But Asaf opposes the idea since they have hardly any troops. Instead, he wants to resort to some carefully contrived

stratagem. Some nobles, however, led by Jai Singh of Amber, support Nurjahan. Nurjahan's forces join battle with Mahabat's retainers. Nurjahan shoots an arrow at Mahabat Khan. An arrow pierces Nurjahan's right arm. She faints. Seeing Nurjahan leaving the battle, her soldiers also fall back. Nurjahan is brought to her garden on the banks of the Jhelum. When she recovers, Ladli is nursing her. Nurjahan clamours to join Jehangir in Mahabat's camp (Jafa, *Nurjahan* [242]~46).

Mahabat's only intention is to force Jehangir to sign firmans making Perveiz Crown Prince. So, when Empress Nurjahan arrives in a palanquin, Mahabat asks his men to convey her to the Emperor's tent. Jehangir appreciates Nurjahan's courage and loyalty, but believes that only Asaf's stratagem will deliver them. Jehangir is indifferent to his captivity and tells Mahabat so. Mahabat is frustrated because he cannot get the Emperor to sign any firman making Perveiz the Crown Prince. Nurjahan now sees that Asaf was right. One day she seeks Mahabat's permission to visit the mausoleum of Babur Shah to offer prayers for the health of the Badshah. Mahabat Khan grants it. Nurjahan smuggles Emperor Jehangir and Prince Dawar Buksh out of the camp in her palanquin. At Babur's mausoleum, they transfer to camels to ride to Jalalabad, whose amir is loyal to the Emperor (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 246-51).

Jehangir goes out hunting in Kashmir. Dawar Buksh spots a mountain bear. Jehangir insists on hunting it, despite Jai Singh's warnings about the terrain. Riding with little caution, Jehangir falls into a chasm (Jafa,

*Nurjahan* [262J-65). Nurjahan **learns** of the Emperor's accident and of the physicians' fear **that** he has **suffered** internal **hemorrhage** (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 267-70).

**With** Nurjahan and all his **important** aides around him, Jehangir announces that **Dawar Buksh will be** his successor. As Dawar **Buksh** clutches **the jewelled hilt of the sword of Jehangir**, the sword slips out of the scabbard **and falls clattering on the ground before he can gird it. Someone cries out that it is a bad omen. Aurangzeb retrieves the sword and restores it to its scabbard. Asaf intervenes and passes the sword to Dawar Buksh. With a gesture, Jehangir dismisses everyone from his tent. Alone with Nurjahan, he whispers that they will all start their power games now. He tells her not to forsake Dawar Buksh. He warns her not to allow Dara and Aurangzeb out of custody if she wishes to hold Khurram in thrall. He also asks her to bury him in her garden in Lahore (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 270-72).**

**Mehrunnisa keeps vigil by Jehangir's bedside throughout the night. Hectic activity goes on outside, each person intent on achieving his secret or open objective. Towards morning Jehangir whispers her maiden name of Mehrunnisa and dies. As the sun rises, Nurjahan realises that for her, all light and splendour is gone with his life and that the years of her loneliness have begun (Jafa, *Nurjahan* 272-74).**

**Murari's *Taj* portrays Mehrunnisa, Emperor Jahangir's last and favourite wife and Aijumand, Mehrunnisa's niece and the wife of Shah Jahan, Jahangir's successor. The entire novel is woman-oriented The story**

of the earlier years unfolds the power play and the intrigues of Mehrunissa, while the story of the later years records Shah Jahan's obsession with the memory of Arjumand.

One morning, twelve-year-old Aijumand, grand daughter of Ghiyas Beg, former Minister to the late Emperor Akbar, is awakened by the sound of thunder in a dream wherein she sees a red object and hears the voice of a man. It is the day of the annual Royal Meena Bazaar, at which the ladies of the Imperial Court of the Mughals are permitted to offer anything for sale. While the other ladies are excited about the Royal Meena Bazaar, Arjumand is not, because she knows that her marriage will be arranged for her and prove no more than a dry coupling of bodies and wealth. However, the dream she has had has left her with the conviction that some man is waiting for her (Murari, *Taj* [5]-9).

Arjumand's aunt, Mehrunissa, is greatly excited about the bazaar, for which she has prepared gold jewellery and silks designed by her (Murari, *Taj* 6-7). Aijumand comments:

' Mehrunissa was an overwhelming woman though very beautiful. She beguiled or bullied those who did not bend to her wishes, and even her husband, General Sher Afkun, whose bravery on the battlefield was unquestioned, fell silent in her presence. She wanted to dazzle and enchant. (Murari, *Taj* 8)

Mehrunissa herself allows a peep into her personality when she says that it is better for women not to be seen but to see everything, since it makes men

wonder about them and dream (Murari, *Taj* 8).

Arjumand stands unveiled at her stall, as decreed by Emperor Humavun, who established the tradition of the annual Royal Mena Bazaar. Strange men stare boldly at her, whispering and laughing among themselves, but, lacking the courage to approach. She is unable to flirt and call to strange women as the other ladies do. So, instead, she simply watches the tamasha. She sees Emperor Jahangir pause by Mehrunissa's stall, purchase something, whisper to her and stroll on. Mehrunissa looks happy and delighted, but soon turns her attention back to the other nobles at her stall (Murari, *Taj* 16-17).

At this instant, Arjumand senses someone's eyes on her. They are insistent, wanting her to turn in their direction. She almost feels their caress. Turning towards the eyes, Arjumand sees Prince Shah Jahan. She is held by his eyes, jet black, longing, lonely, alight with the glow of a boy afraid. She knows that she is the cause of his fear and she cannot turn away from him (Murari, *Taj* 17). Shah Jahan disappears from her sight, filling her with fear, but soon she sees him fighting his way through the crowd towards her and, reassured, she sinks into a soft, warm dream (Murari, *Taj* 17).

Reaching Arjumand's stall somehow, Shah Jahan loudly and swiftly blurts out to her:

'I felt as if we touched . . . . But it was not possible at that distance. Yet I felt your arm gently on mine. To love swiftly is to

chance life itself. It Is a leap of trust like entering a battle without the protection of armour, believing that somehow you cannot be killed. But even if you were killed, mere existence would not be worth it without you. You must tell me who you are. I must hear your voice and know you are truly real and not a dream that will disappear like water in this heat.' (Murari, *Taj* 21)

Shah Jahan declares his love in several ways. He touches Arjumand and makes her touch him and both feel the shock of lightning. She tells him a little of her dream and he feels that he has known her all his life (Murari, *Taj* 22-23).

That night Arjumand is unable to sleep, but pretends to. She hears her cousin Ladilli slipping into her bed and feels the presence of another female. Peeping, she sees Mehrunissa standing over her, staring intently, and feels uneasy at her presence and the intensity of her study. She sees Mehrunissa glance at Ladilli and then leave (Murari, *Taj* 26-27).

Soon after the day of the Royal Meena Bazaar, there are rumours of Shah Jahan's love for Arjumand and reports that he walks the Palace corridors like a ghost searching for solace. For her part, Arjumand waits for word from Shah Jahan, always listless and sleeping poorly. As Isa, her eunuch, tries in vain to divert her, they hear a terrible scream and rush into the house. Mehrunissa is in a fit of fury because the Emperor has appointed her husband Sher Afkun the Diwan of Bengal, which is a thousand kos away (Murari, *Taj* [33]-35). The next moment, however, she turns from her

husband and **Aijumand**, observing the change that overtakes her face, comments:

What I **saw** frightened me and only half confirmed the whispers I had heard. Jahangir lusted for her. He too had been struck down with longing on the night of the bazaar. It had indeed been a momentous evening for this family. Jahangir was stamped in her face and eyes. Diwan, Mir **Saman**, these appointments were merely toys for the Emperor to discard. Mehrunissa had tamed her face to see in which direction the threads of power led, and having discovered it, like a simpleton suddenly seeing through the magician's trick, she knew how she could bend it to her will. It was a moment of naked **fury**, but before she turned around, her features had settled back into a dimpled smile. (Murari, *Taj* 35-36)

On the day before the departure of General Sher Afkurt and Mehrunissa for Bengal, Emperor Jahangir honours Ghiyas Beg's house with a personal visit. Mehrunissa, preparing for the great visit like all the other **members** of the household, sends for Isa. She gives him a small ivory case secretly and commands him, on pain of death, to guard it, tell no one that she gave it to him, and personally hand it over to Jahangir. Hiding the gift in his clothing, Isa returns to Aijumand, his face perspiring. Arjumand does not want to know anything about his meeting with Mehrunissa, since it has made him unhappy, which indicates that he will be in danger if the secret is

let out (Murari, *Taj* 36-40).

Arriving at the house of Mehrunissa, Jahangir affectionately embraces her father and her husband. Isa serves the Emperor wine and places Mehrunissa's gift on the tray explaining that it is a humble gift from himself. Jahangir breaks the seal and opens the ivory box. It is a painting of Mehrunissa lying on a divan, revealing every part of her beauty for his eyes. Jahangir does not lift his head from the pleasure of gazing on that painted form.. He takes the box to the light to study the painting closely. The flames obviously reveal even more delights, because Jahangir sighs aloud. Isa perceives that Jahangir cannot resist Mehrunissa, who has captured his heart with her boldness. When Ghiyas Beg wishes to examine the gift, Jahangir closes the box and dismisses it as a puzzle. However, he wishes to reward Isa and throws him an emerald ring. Then he asks Ghiyas Beg to bid the women join them, since their singing will add to his pleasure. Ghiyas summons the women. When they arrive, Jahangir gives them permission to remove their veils. When Jahangir notices that Mehrunissa has not come, Ghiyas Beg asks Sher Afikun to fetch his wife. Sher Aflcun does so rather reluctantly. When Mehrunissa lifts her veil, Jahangir claps with pleasure. That same evening Jahangir elevates Ghiyas Beg to the position of Itiam-ud-daulah, the Pillar of Government (Murari, *Taj* 40-43).

Prince Shah Jahan, practising sword-play with his tutor, General Mahabat Khan, dreams of Arjumand. Mahabat Khan reprimands him for it and points out that he could have killed Shah Jahan thrice. He advises Shah

Jahan to forget **Aijumand** because, unlike a soldier or a villager, a prince cannot love but must marry for politics. Shah Jahan protests **that** his father Jahangir is obsessed with Mehrunissa. Mahabat Khan **silently** cautions him against any indiscreet mention **of Mehrunissa** which could endanger **their** lives (Murari, *Taj* [51]-53).

Granted **an** audience with the Padishah, Prince Shah **Jahan**, with trepidation, broaches the subject of his love for Aijumand. Shall Jahan presumes that since, according to rumours, his father stifled his love for Mehrunissa **to** obey his father Akbar, who wished for a strong alliance with the Rana **of Malwar**, he will not, now, deny him his love for Arjumand (Murari, *Taj* **56-61**). Jahangir, however, responds contrary to his expectation. Perceiving that his case is lost, Shah. Jahan pleads that marrying **Aijumand** will **make him happy, but Jahangir says:**

**‘Ah, badmash, you have not listened to me... . Make you happy? A peasant can say, “I will do this,” and do it. Who does it affect? Only himself, perhaps his immediate family. But if Shah Jahan says, “I will do this because it makes me happy,” it affects the whole kingdom. What does Aijumand bring with her? Wealth? Power? A kingdom? A political alliance? Will marrying her make a friend of an enemy, as Akbar always advised? Will it extend the empire? If the answer is “Yes” to every question, then you have my permission to marry her.’ (Murari, *Taj* 61)**

**Since the answers are “no”, Jahangir advises Shah Jahan to marry first for**

the kingdom and then Aijumand as his second wife. Shah Jahan says that he wants Arjumand as his first and only wife. Jahangir is enraged and tells Shah Jahan to do as he commands. He also tells his son that he has already chosen his wife (Murari, *Taj* 62).

Jahangir is moving north from Agra on a hunting trip. Arjumand rides a bay pony despite Isa's entreaties to ride in a palanquin screened from the dust. **They** are two days out of Agra. On **the** third day Arjumand's party is **to** leave the Imperial train and turn south towards Bengal, where Arjumand is to visit Mehrunissa. That night Isa whispers to her that a messenger has arrived from the prince. Aijumand goes with Isa to meet the messenger. It is Shah Jahan himself. He assures her that he will never change his mind, **that** she **will be** his wife and that their son will mount the throne after him (Murari, *Taj* [73]-82).

Aijumand is escorted towards Bengal by five hundred horsemen and a dozen maidservants and Isa. One night there is a commotion because of the arrival of some horsemen. Isa announces a messenger from the Padishah who is to speak only to her. The armed messenger has a scar running up his forehead into his turban and wears nondescript clothing under his armour. The messenger says that he is a member of the Ahadi, the Emperor's own bodyguards. Arjumand is disturbed because, instead of wearing the Imperial scarlet of the Ahadi, the man is dressed like a dacoit. He delivers two packages, sealed with the Muhr Uzak, the Imperial Seal, which are to be delivered personally by Arjumand to Mehrunissa, being gifts from the

Emperor. Arjumand learns from the messenger that he has brought two hundred Ahadi horsemen with him and that they will ride with her party to Bengal (Murari, *Taj* 82-85).

Thirty days later they reach Gaur, where Sher Afkun is stationed. The Ahadi horsemen disappear. Mehrunissa receives Jahangir's gifts with pleasure and sends them to her room. She refuses to show Arjumand what the golden casket from Jahangir contains. She asks her not to mention the gifts to her uncle lest he misunderstand. Mehrunissa advises Arjumand to forget Shall Jahan. But she maintains that she cannot and will not, even if he were a beggar. She then begs Mehrunissa to help her by speaking or writing to the Emperor. At first Mehrunissa pretends that she has no power over Jahangir, but, changing her mind, promises to try to help (Murari, *Taj* 89-90).

Mehrunissa asks Sher Afkun to arrange a qamargah, a form of hunting, for Aijumand's entertainment so as to enable her to shoot a tiger. Sher Afkun chooses the jungle east of Gaur for the qamargah, an area abounding in tigers. The hunting party makes camp the night before with much food and drink. The men gather in Sher Afkun's tent and the women in Mehrunissa's. Around midnight, as the women retire, they can still hear the merrymaking of the men. At dawn Aijumand is awakened by the sound of shouting and the clash of swords coming from Sher Afkun's tent. As Aijumand tries to go out of the tent, Mehrunissa stops her. Arjumand observes that Mehrunissa is neither afraid nor surprised, but seems to know

exactly what is happening. When the uproar stops, they hear horses galloping into the night. Mehrunissa releases her grip on Arjumand who goes to Sher Afkun's tent and finds him lying dead. One of the five other men lying dead is the Emperor's messenger with the scar on his forehead. The Mir Bakshi, the Paymaster General, pronounces that it is the work of dacoits. Mehrunissa weeps long and loud and Arjumand is unable to console her. The Mir Bakshi sends a report to Jahangir, who sends his condolences to Mehrunissa and appoints her lady-in-waiting to one of Akbars widows, Salima (Murari, *Taj* 91-94).

The women of the harem vie with each other to catch a glimpse of Shah Jahan's bride, while Arjumand sits alone in her room, with Isa keeping her sympathetic company. Then Arjumand forces herself to watch the arrival and reception of the niece of the Shahinshah of Persia, bringing a caravan of gifts sent by her uncle and the Shahinshah's friendship. Princess Gulbadan's arrival in Agra signals a new era of friendship between the Mughal and the Shahinshah (Murari, *Taj* 103-04).

Though preparations are afoot for his marriage to Princess Gulbadan, Prince Shah Jahan yearns for Arjumand's touch. He writes a poem for her and is looking for someone trustworthy to send it through, when he is summoned by the Padishah. Jahangir laments his inability to persuade Mehrunissa to marry him. Shah Jahan knows that Mehrunissa will settle for nothing less than the power of the throne, but does not say so. He does not care for his father's loneliness but only for his own. He is worried about

**whether he can trust Mehrunissa to change Jahangir's attitude to his love for Arjumand. Jahangir pathetically shows Shah Jahan a poem he has written for Mehrunissa. Jahangir is angry with the Shahinshah for sending his niece and not his daughter as the bride. Shah Jahan pounces on this point and tries to build upon it. But Jahangir douses his enthusiasm by stating that it is too late, since he has accepted Guibadan as Shah Jahan's bride. However, Jahangir now acknowledges the force of Shah Jahan's love for Arjumand and gives him permission to make her his second wife. Shah Jahan refuses to make Arjumand inferior to Guibadan and also declares that Arjumand will bear his sons. When Shah Jahan persistently refers to his father's love for Mehrunissa, Jahangir asks him to stop seeing his reflection in his father. Reminding Shah Jahan that what he does is for the good of the entire empire, Jahangir dismisses him (Murari, *Taj* 109-17).**

**Shah Jahan goes through the wedding ceremony perfunctorily. It is clear that Guibadan is not happy with the wedding. She behaves as if she is mourning. A coldness has set in between husband and wife, though they are made to lie in the same bed (Murari, *Taj* 121-23).**

**Shah Jahan is sent to his jagir of Hissan Firoz to learn the craft of kingship in Lahore. ■ He is unhappy because it is a thousand kos from Agra, where his Arjumand is. His wife, Guibadan, grows sour, suspicious and evil. She feels belittled and humiliated, particularly because she knows that other women drain the swollen lust of his body. She also knows that Arjumand-comes between her and her husband. Meanwhile, Arjumand's**

continued loyalty humbles Shah Jahan. Gulbadan cannot be divorced easily. So Shah Jahan waits, as does Arjumand (Murari, *Taj* 134-36).

Arjumand describes the deliberate calculation with which Mehrunissa acquires power:

Only recently my aunt had finally succumbed to the overtures of Jahangir.' He had already become her puppet. She chose the time well for her capitulation. I had asked her over a year ago, why did she wait if she loved him? I could not understand; if I had been her I would have moved swiftly. We have so little time on this earth. She replied: 'Jahangir is Emperor. He can have all his desires, whenever he so wishes. If he points his arm to the east or west or north or south, the whole Mughal power will march until he commands it to halt. There must be a few things in life even an emperor cannot acquire easily. I will be one of those things. In his eyes it will give me greater worth than the throne itself. If I had swooned immediately at his interest—and how many of the discarded women did so?—he would have lost all desire. Already he calls me in his poems, Nur Mahal. I am the light of his palace, the candle in his heart.' (Murari, *Taj* 137)

At last Arjumand gets to see Prince Shah Jahan when Emperor Jahangir, observing tradition, rides to his bride Mehrunissa's home for their marriage. Shah Jahan and his brothers accompany Jahangir. Shah Jahan's eyes constantly sweep the enclosure, knowing that Arjumand is waiting

behind the lattice. At this, Aijumand is reassured that her beloved has not changed. It is clear from his longing look that Shah Jahan wishes to meet her. However, Arjumand cannot leave the ceremony. Their only chance is the feast in the palace garden that evening. During the feast Isa brings Aijumand to a dark corner of the garden where Shah Jahan is waiting impatiently for her. The lovers feel each other in the dark. He finds her more beautiful than before and she finds him more handsome than before. He assures her that his father will soon permit them to marry. She says that her aunt Mehrunissa will persuade the Emperor. Shah Jahan kisses her and, giving her a present, leaves (Murari, *Taj* 140-46).

Khusrav's warning against Mehranissa's machinations preys on Arjumand's mind until she is convinced that her aunt is capable of broaching a union between Shah Jahan and her own daughter Ladilli. So she seeks the help of her grandfather and her father who is an adviser on financial matters to the Emperor. When she tells them of Khusrav's warning, her grandfather says that Khusrav's ears are too sharp. He assures her that he and her father will speak to the Emperor against forcing Shah Jahan into another marriage that he does not want, since it will only cause a rift between father and son. Mehrunissa, thus defeated, summons Aijumand to the royal haram. Aijumand goes to Mehranissa's suite of rooms and finds her in full possession of the Imperial Seal. Mehrunissa informs her that Shah Jahan's marriage to Princess Gulbadan will be dissolved on the ground that Gulbadan is sterile, though she has protested

that Shah Jahan has never slept with her. She will be sent back with generous gifts for herself and for her uncle the Shahinshah. Then Shah Jahan and Arjumand **cm marry** on an auspicious day to be decided by the astrologer (**Murari, Taj 170-73**).

On the auspicious day, Shah Jahan comes to Arjumand's house, riding behind Jahangir. The nikah ceremony is conducted and Arjumand is then allowed to sleep throughout the day. In the evening there is a great wedding feast arranged by Mehrunissa. Later Arjumand is prepared for the nuptial bed. Shah Jahan comes to her filled with love. He promises that they will never be apart again. They make love and find heavenly pleasure (**Murari, Taj 176-80**).

Shah **Jahan** gets ready to go on a campaign against the Mewar Rajputs, **who have been lighting against the Mughals all the time and whom even Akbar could not defeat, though he destroyed their city of Chitor. Since Aijumand is pregnant, Shah Jahan tells her that she must stay behind. She refuses to do so and holds him to his promise made on their nuptial night. When he says that the Mewar Rajputs may be unconquerable, Arjumand hastens to dispel such a notion. She points out that Mehrunissa has chosen him to lead the Mughal forces, over General Mahabat Khan, because she expects him to lose and, as part of her continuing fight with him, she wants him to lose the war and lose face. Aijumand urges that he must win the war for their sake (Murari, Taj 180-83).**

**Aijumand loses the child. Shah Jahan is frustrated by the useless siege**

of Udaipur. He fears the taunts **and** machinations of Mehrunissa and the possibility of her sending Jahangir or Mahabat Khan. At the same **time**, since the Rajputs have enough supplies inside Udaipur, they will come out only when the Mughal army is gone from around it. Arjumand suggests to Shah Jahan to visualise what will happen when the Mughal army is gone and the Rajputs come out to the fields. The suggestion gives Shah Jahan the idea of scorching the earth around Udaipur fort. His scorched earth policy brings the Rana to heel. Acting prudently, Shah Jahan does not step on the pride of the Sisodia. Thereby he not only defeats Mewar, but also wins the Sisodia's life-long friendship (Murari, *Taj* [199]-204).

Mehrunissa takes whatever credit she can for Shah Jahan's victory over Mewar and fesses over Arjumand, because Shah Jahan is now powerful. Shall Jahan's victory has only increased her power. When the Deccan once more becomes restive, she tells Jahangir to despatch Shah Jahan south (Murari, *Taj* 205-10). Shah Jahan crushes the Deccan rebels and returns victorious (Murari, *Taj* 210-16).

Arjumand is proud of her husband's achievements, but she is tired and hopes for peace so that they can lead normal lives. She asks Mehrunissa to send Mahabat Khan next time so that she can stay in Agra for a while. But Mehrunissa reprimands her for going with Shah Jahan everywhere. Seeing that Arjumand is pregnant again, she reprimands her for that too. But Aijumand stubbornly refuses to deny Shah Jahan her bed or to send him to some other woman, mainly because her love calms him and she enjoys

seeing Ms happiness, despite her pain. Mehrunissa gives up counselling Arjumand on the subject. Jahangir sings the praises of Shah Jahan and bathes him in showers of precious stones and gold coins and presents him with the first copy of the *Jahangirnama*, which bears ample proof of his love for Shah Jahan. Jahangir also leads Shah Jahan to a gold chair by the throne, making him the first prince ever to be allowed to sit before his father in court (Murari, *Taj* 216-20).

Arjumand is pregnant again and hakim Wazir Khan protests. He advises her to refuse her husband for a year or two. He refers to his several wives and Arjumand cuts him short. He leaves. Isa hurries in with the news that the Emperor is ill and that some say he is dying (Murari, *Taj* 224-26).

Shah Jahan is disturbed by Mehrunissa's choice of the idiot Shahriya to marry her daughter Ladilli. He fears that Mehrunissa will try to make Shahriya the Emperor after Jahangir. So he consults Arjumand's father, Asaf Khan, who says that Shah Jahan is the first of Jahangir's sons and that Mehrunissa gathers enemies. Shah Jahan points out that she holds Jahangir and now Shahriya too. He asks whom Jahangir will choose as his successor. Arjumand is certain that Jahangir will choose only the son whom Mehrunissa chooses. She adds that Mehrunissa knows that, she will oppose her. Shah Jahan feels that their time of peace is ending because of Mehrunissa's machinations. Asaf Khan advises him to wait patiently because any precipitate action will frighten the sick Jahangir and because

**Mehrunissa** is wise enough to keep Jahangir informed of all her moves. Finally Asaf Khan **assures him that he will support him in the ghusl-khana**. The magnificence of **Ladilli's marriage** clearly points to **Mehrunissa's** intentions. Shah **Jahan** does **not attend the wedding**, feigning illness. **Aijumand** is unable to attend **it because** her new-born **baby** died within **an** hour. A little while after **Ladilli's wedding**, Mehrunissa makes her move—Shah Jahan is ordered **to** march south (Murari, *Taj* 246-47).

The prospect **of** another campaign against the Deccan rebels is not enticing **to** Shah Jahan, because it promises no great reward and threatens to take him farthest away from the Court which is preparing to move north to Lahore. Shah Jahan seeks an audience with Jahangir, who is irritated by his questions and statements. Shah **Jahan begs pardon and blessing and permission to take his chained and blinded brother Khusrav with him to the Deccan. Jahangir consents. Asaf Khan promises to send a messenger every seven days to the Deccan to report on the Emperor's health and Mehrunissa's thoughts. Quite significantly, Mehrunissa has appointed Shah Jahan's brother Parwez to the position of Subadar of Lahore and taken Shahriya and Ladilli with her to Lahore (Murari, Taj 248-50).**

**In the Deccan, Khusrav warns Shah Jahan to beware the machinations of Mehrunissa and her whisperings into Jahangir's ears and advises him to kill her. Arjumand is a constant source of comfort and counsel to Shah Jahan. Whereas Shah Jahan laments moving and being far away from his father and the Court, Aijumand looks at it positively. To her, every victory**

of Shah **Jahan's** diminishes **Mehrunissa's** power while **it increases his**. **Moreover, he** is the Mughal **in** the Deccan with land and men that **his father** cannot take away from **him**. This, to her, is Shah **jahan's conquest**. Seeing **the** truth of her analysis. Shall Jahan is comforted. So they lead a **peaceful life at Burhanpur**. The Emperor's **health improves and Mehrunissa stays her hand**. **Suddenly, one morning, a messenger from Asaf Khan brings the news that Jahangir is ill, near to death**. Shah Jahan asks Isa to send Allami Sa'du-lla Khan to him and to ask him to bring two trustworthy soldiers. Shah Jahan enters Khusrav's room. Khusrav senses his presence and wakes up. He perceives Shah Jahan's intention and asks, "'Taktya takhta'," that is, throne or coffin. Shah Jahan answers, "'Takhta.'" Aijumand, who has arrived on the scene, intervenes to prevent the murder of Khusrav. But Khusrav accuses her of having sent Shah Jahan to kill him. Shah Jahan denies this and leads her to the door. She begs him not to kill Khusrav. But Shah Jahan says that he must, because Khusrav still has some followers. Aijumand suggests exiling Khusrav or keeping him chained instead of killing him. But Shah Jahan is determined to kill Khusrav (Murari, *Taj* 250-56; [267]-69).

Arjumand learns the details of the murder of Khusrav. Too late they learn that it has been done in too much haste: a messenger from Asaf Khan brings the news that Jahangir lives. Soon, another message comes from Jahangir himself. It acknowledges the receipt of Shah Jahan's report that Khusrav died of the colic. It informs him that Shah Abbas, the Shahinshah

of Persia, marches on Kandahar. Since Jahangir proposes to meet him with the greatest force, he can command, the Emperor orders Shah Jahan to march north with all his forces immediately. Arjumand. sees the ghost of Khusrav behind the order. Shah Jahan sees the hand of Mehrunissa in it. He fears that, if he obeys Jahangir's orders, he will lose the Deccan, which he regards as his land and that, if he loses it, he will be reduced to the subjugation of his father and. Mehrunissa. At the same time, if he refuses to obey, his father will be enraged. So Shah Jahan paces the balcony for days. Meanwhile Mehrunissa persuades Jahangir to transfer all Shah Jahan's jagirs to Shahriya, including Hissan Feroz, the traditional lands of the Crown. Prince, as Asaf Khan's message reports. Mehrunissa has pushed her good-for-nothing son-in-law one step closer to the throne and herself one step further towards ruling after Jahangir's death. Shah Jahan is certain that when Jahangir dies, she will proclaim Shahriya Emperor before he can strike out. Upon Arjumand's advice, Shah. Jahan tells Jahangir that he has to wait till, the rains are over. This displeases Jahangir, who rages at Shah Jahan, calling him bi-daulat, even writing the name in his *Jahangirnama*, so that **all** the world should know that he is the wretch. Jahangir commands Shah Jahan to remain in Burhanpur for ever but send the army immediately. Shah Jahan is in a dilemma, because he is nothing at all without his forces, whereas, by withholding them, he will enrage his father once more. Upon Arjumand's advice, Shah Jahan sends his friend Ailami Sa'du-lla Khan to Lahore to beg Jahangir's forgiveness. She is certain that he will grant it and

says that they can then march to Kandahar (Murari, *Taj* 271-74).

**Allami Sa'du-lla Khan returns with a dark face (Murari, *Taj* 274). Shah Jahan decides to race to Agra before his father can reach there from Agra and capture the treasury. Bui Allami Sa'du-lla Khan informs him that the treasury is soon to be moved to Lahore to pay the Emperor's army (Murari, *Taj* 275).**

**Shah Jahan marches north swiftly though delayed by Arjumand's pregnant state. He learns that he is now being referred to at Court as the usurper. He also learns that Kandahar has fallen to Shah Abbas. The fall of Kandahar enrages Jahangir, who blames Shah Jahan for it and decides to march south to do battle with his own son. On the twenty-fifth day of the march, Shah Jahan knows that his plan to take control of the treasury will not succeed because the Mughal army is already between him and Agra, commanded by his old tutor General Mahabat Khan (Murari, *Taj* 275-76).**

**The two armies face each other at Balockpur. Shah Jahan meets his old tutor who reports that Jahangir is in good health, but complains constantly about his rascal son (Murari, *Taj* 276-78). Mahabat Khan contemptuously reports:**

**'He [Jahangir] only listens to that... woman. I do not bow to an emperor now, but to an empress. Every hour I receive her messages. Attack, attack: destroy Shah Jahan. I must be victorious. Do I need more men? Do I need more cannon? I can command what I want.'** (Murari, *Taj* 278-79)

Shah **Jahan** escapes by night, taking only five thousand loyal horsemen with him and his family. The remainder of the army disperses into the night, the soldiers going to their villages or joining **Mahabat Khan**. As the news of their defeat has preceded them, all the villages *en route* are silent and the land looks deserted. Palaces are closed, forts barred, and Ranas, **Nawabs**, Amirs and nobles all ignore them. **Aijumand** asks Shah Jahan to go **without** her and the children so that he can ride faster, but he rejects the idea. It is clear that **Mahabat Khan** has given Shah Jahan **time to** escape. Jahangir has now sent **Parwez** to join Mahabat Khan. **Shahriya** has not been sent perhaps because Mehrunissa does not want to risk Ms life and is keeping the future Emperor hidden safe in the **haram**. **Shah Jahan and Arjumand discuss their plight and decide to seek refuge with the Rana of Mewar, Karan Singh. Shah Jahan also decides to send Allami Sa'du-lla Khan, with most of his horsemen, south in order to trick Mahabat Khan into thinking that he is escaping to his old fort of Burhanpur and so into pursuing them south, while, actually, he will be moving with his family and a small force westwards towards Udaipur. Allami Sa'du-lla Khan's force is to lead Mahabat Khan, Parwez and the Mughal army as far away from Mewar as possible for one month and then disband (Murari, *Taj* [301J-06).**

**Shah Jahan and his family shed their princely clothes and jewellery and his one hundred horsemen are dressed like dacoits. They travel by night, avoiding towns and forts and camping in ravines and deep forests. At the border of Mewar, the Sisodia, Karan Singh, welcomes them in person,**

touching Shah Jahan's knee. He says that they can stay in Mewar as long as they wish. Shah Jahan says **that they need rest, particularly Arjumand (Murari, *Taj* 306-07). Arjumand and Shah Jahan are at peace, though they are constantly aware that it is only a temporary<sup>7</sup> respite. Though they are hidden, others have eyes and know of their presence. There are whispers against Mehrunissa. Arjumand's father writes to tell them that the nobles are stirring in unease, unhappy about Mehrunissa's relentless pursuit of Shah Jahan (Murari, *Taj* 308-09).**

About one hundred days later, Allami Sa'du-lia Khan rejoins them, thin and tired. He misled Mahabat Khan as far south as Mandu. Then the Mughal army sensed trickery and turned back, looking for Shah Jahan and his family. Arjumand spends each day in breathless fear. She has regained her strength, but is again pregnant. Shah Jahan waits for danger to strike, because the Mughal army will soon discover their retreat and they will have to run from their island seclusion. They are warned when Mahabat Khan is a day's ride from their retreat. Karan Singh is prepared to send his army to meet the Mughal army. But Shah Jahan prefers to escape. They flee through torrential rains and mud and puddles. Their only opening is southwards towards the Deccan. Shah Jahan is keen to take Aijumand along because no one else can give him the comfort, the courage and the love which he needs on this long endless pursuit. The rains give way to the heat (Murari, *Taj* 309-11).

**When they reach Mandu on the ninetieth day, they have to stop ■**

because Aijumand has started bleeding. Thanks to the hakim's ministrations, the bleeding stops, but the child is lost. They have to wait for ten days before she can even sit up. A soldier brings the news that Mahabat Khan is only a few days behind them. Allami Sa'du-Ila Khan says that they cannot move south because Mahabat Khan has sent a detachment there under Parwez. They can only move east or west through narrow passages. Allami Sa'du-Ila Khan is against surrendering because Mehrunissa, not being of the Timurid line, may persuade Jahangir to take Shah Jahan's life. As Shah Jahan feels defeated, a soldier brings in a small man with a bearded face, threadbare clothes and dusty turban. He introduces himself as Arjun Lai, who was once about to be executed but was saved by Shah **Jahan's"intervention**. He is now a dacoit and a fugitive and he knows these hills and ravines well because they are his home. He offers to lead Shah Jahan to safety and to a place where they can rest until it is safe for them to travel. He leads them by night into a well-concealed valley far away from Mahabat Khan and Parwez who cannot discover their hideout. They rest : there till Arjumand regains her strength (Murari, *Taj* **311-14**).

By the third winter, they reach Bengal. They move north to escape the unwholesome climate, cross the Damodar and reach the banks of the Jamuna. Learning that the Mughal army is moving south, they retrace their steps and reach the very southern borders of the empire. Near Kawardha, Shah Jahan and Mahabat Khan fight a brief skirmish. They withdraw and Mahabat Khan remains in position though he can overwhelm them with his

superior forces.. Shah Jahan writes a letter to Jahangir, seeking his forgiveness and peace with him, placing his life at his disposal. He asks Allami Sa'du-lla Khan to deliver the letter personally to Jahangir. He says that Mehrunissa will not permit it, that he will have to give it to her wazir, the eunuch Muneer and that, whether or not he receives pardon will depend upon Mehrunissa. However, he promises to do his best and to whisper Shah Jahan's surrender to everyone at court so that all will know that he is no longer at fault. Jahangir's reply comes after one hundred and eighteen days to Burhanpur. It is in Mehrunissa's hand—her power is so open. She forgives Shah Jahan on the condition that he surrenders his forts and accepts the governorship of Balaghat, a remote and useless suba and also sends Dara and Aurangzeb to her as hostages. Shah Jahan accepts the terms. When the firman comes, he places his forehead on it, signifying his humility and obedience to the Emperor. However, he is still wary of Mehrunissa where his life is concerned. So he and Arjumand stay on in the Deccan. Mahabat Khan sends an escort of ten thousand horsemen for Dara and Aurangzeb. Arjumand sends Isa with them to protect them from all harm (Murari, *Taj* 322-25).

Isa presents Dara and Aurangzeb to Jahangir. Isa describes Mehrunissa's current status:

Though Jahangir had grown old, Mehrunissa remained ageless.  
True, her eyes had shadowed, but her beauty was still remarkable.  
The long black hair that fell to her waist was unstained by grey,

and her waist could still be spanned by the two hands of a man. Her authority was stamped in her upright posture, and in that silence which those in power use to humble others. Power is silence, for the powerful do not have to negotiate; they only command. That weapon gave her a secretive serenity. (Murari, *Taj* 344-45)

Mehrunissa enquires about Arjumand and asks if she is still angry with her, since she has sent only her affection, not her love, for her aunt. She asks Isa to tell Shah Jahan that the misunderstanding is in the past and that she bears him no malice. It is clear to Isa that she is bargaining for a compromise. She says that she will obey the Timurid law and asks if Shah Jahan will. She reveals her concern by saying: “Taktya takhta. There is a precision in those words, such a stark choice. If only between them there were a third, an escape.” Isa mercilessly says that there always is and that the Shahinshah will always give shelter to a Mughal’s son (Murari, *Taj* 345-47).

Isa is aware that her confessions are not idle words, but meant to be conveyed to Shah Jahan to bargain for Shahriya’s life, for she tells him: “If Shah Jahan should become emperor, Shahriya will be quite content with a governorship: Lahore, the Punjab, as far away as Shah Jahan wishes. Ladilli will ensure that he does not continue to harbour any ambition to mount the throne...(Murari, *Taj* 347). She regrets the hardships that Aijumand has undergone because of her love for and her loyalty to Shah

Jahan (Murari, *Taj* 347-48).

In the winter, a messenger escorted by a thousand horsemen, comes to announce that Jahangir died in Kashmir. After ordering one hundred days of mourning throughout the Empire, Shah Jahan goes to the Masjid in Asigarh, where, reading the Quoran, he declares himself Emperor, with the title of Emperor Abdul Muzaffar Shahabuddin Mohammed Shah Jahan Ghazi. It is only a gesture and he hastens north to Agra, flying the banner of the Emperor to counter any challenge from Mehrunissa,,who is still manipulating her son-in-law Shahriya, building armies and beating the drums for war (Murari, *Taj* 350-51).

Once Shah Jahan becomes Emperor, loneliness is his destiny, with everyone becoming deferential towards him, the only exception being his beloved Aijumand, as he records:

The only true companion I had, who showed no change towards me, remaining as transparent and serene as water, was my beloved Arjumand. To her I had never been a prince, nor was I an emperor now. I was her husband, her lover, my heart was still entwined with hers. Our love was trust; they were fused as if wrought of finest metal. I could not breathe beyond her presence; in it, the loneliness was dispelled... . (Murari, *Taj* 352)

Despite the evidence of support for him, Shah Jahan is worried by Shahriya's persistence in pressing his claim, goaded by Mehrunissa. She is unable to relinquish the sceptre. Shah Jahan has to act swiftly to prevent

**unsettling** wars. Arjumand counsels him to exile **Shahriya**. But **Shah Jahan** argues **that** Shahriya will return with **an** army to do battle. So she counsels him to keep Shahriya imprisoned and hopes that, since he is an idiot, his followers **will** soon leave him and that **his** ambition will die **in** time. **Shah Jahan** is not afraid of his ambition, but Mehrunissa's, which will never end **unless he kills Shahriya**. Aijumand **pleads against killing Shahriya, saying that his blood will stain their lives as Khusrav's did**. **Shah Jahan pleads that kingship has no kinship**. Arjumand cites Akbar's advice that a king should be a father to all his people. **Shah Jahan counters with another piece of advice by Akbar, which justifies the death of Shahriya, because he commits treason against the Padishah**. Aijumand is cowed by the Emperor's power (Murari, *Taj* 352-53).

**Shah Jahan sends a message to Aijumand's father in Lahore to execute Shahriya and his sons. This is done on the day Shah Jahan reaches Agra. The land now has only one king. The city welcomes him. The nobles and the captains of the Empire await him in the diwan-i-am. Shah Jahan embraces Karan Singh of Mewar before he can bow. Mahabat Khan discreetly hides behind a pillar. Shah Jahan walks up to him and asks him what he wants. Mahabat Khan places himself at Shah Jahan's disposal. Shah Jahan commands him to lead his armies and serve him as he served his father and his grandfather loyally. Shah Jahan mounts the throne of the Great Mughal. A week passes in the formalities of accession and the swearing of allegiance to his person by the princes and nobles** (Murari, *Taj*

355-58).

**Shah Jahan appoints Arjumand's father Ivfir Sam an, the Commerce Minister. He summons Mehrunissa to attend on him in Agra. She comes reluctantly. Before her arrival, Shah Jahan gives Arjumand the most powerful gift an emperor can bestow on a trusted companion—the Muhr Uzak, the symbol of his power and of his trust (Murari, *Taj* 359). He tells her: “You will keep the Muhr Uzak. It is the symbol of my power, and of my trust. You will temper my judgement with your kindness and love; you will be the rein on my injustice, if Allah should so blind me” (Murari, *Taj* 359). Arjumand returns the Muhr Uzak to him saying: “You are the king, my beloved, not I; I have no wish to rule like Mehrunissa. I know you will be gentle and kind to your people as you have all these years been towards me” (Murari, *Taj* 359). Shah Jahan forces the Muhr Uzak back on her, saying: “An emperor needs a curb. You must be my guide in what is good and what is bad” (Murari, *Taj* 359).**

**Mehrunissa accepts defeat with no humility, but only resignation, and awaits Shah Jahan's command. Arjumand, however, embraces Mehrunissa with forgiveness.. She changes the course of the discussion to personal . affairs (Murari, *Taj* 361). Arjumand places her arm affectionately around Mehrunissa's shoulders and tells her to build a great tomb for Jahangir. So Shah Jahan forgives Mehrunissa (Murari, *Taj* 361).**

**Within a month of Shah Jahan's becoming Emperor in Agra, Aijumand is again pregnant and very ill. She has been advised rest and**

quiet. She is now called Empress Mumtaz-i-Mahal, the Chosen One of the Palace, but she wants Shah. Jahan to call her only Arjumand, as always. She suffers an abortion and is unconscious for several days (Murari, *Taj* [373]-75).

Aijumand likes her position as Empress because it enables her to help the poor and the needy:

I now had unlimited wealth. It had always been the tradition of the Mughal emperors to keep a large leather sack of money, one lakh of dams, to distribute to the needy. One stood at the entrance to the palace. I made sure it was emptied, and daily it would be refilled. I no longer needed to beg for contributions. I was empress, and as my beloved built palaces, I built humbler places: schools, hospitals for the treatment of the sick, homes for the homeless. Each week, still in the company of Isa, but now escorted by soldiers, I fed the poor. I could not in truth claim, as I became more used to it, that I disliked my position. (Murari, *Taj* 377)

The Deccani rats again start nibbling at the borders of the Empire and Shah Jahan has to move south. He wants Arjumand to go with Mm, but the hakim does not wish her to travel, as she is pregnant for the fourteenth, time. Shah Jahan says that they can travel slowly and according to her convenience. He commands the Mir Manzil to construct the most luxurious rath for Arjumand's comfort, as desired by her. A few days after their

arrival at **Burhanpur**, Arjumand experiences labour pains and, for the first time in her life, is frightened. She screams and asks for Shah Jahan, but he is away at **Asigarh**. After a great struggle, she delivers a female baby. Quite strangely, she calls Isa her friend, says that she **will** miss him and makes him promise to remain always by her beloved. Shall Jahan arrives. Arjumand cannot see clearly. Feeling an irresistible sleep overtaking her, Arjumand extracts a promise from Shah. Jahan that he will not marry again lest her sons and those of the next wife battle and shed blood. She also makes him promise not to forget his Arjumand. She finally asks him to kiss her. As Shah Jahan is .kissing her, Arjumand.-dies (Murari, *Taj* 387-92).

**-Khosla's** novel *The Last Mughal* tells the story of the-enslavement of the last two emperors of the Mughal **dynasty**. The 'first part of the novel presents how Emperor **Akbar** the Second is manipulated to act against his own son Abu Zafar **by** three women—his favourite queen, his mother and his paternal aunt. The second part of the novel presents how Abu Zafar himself, upon becoming Emperor, comes under the spell of his last and favourite queen Zeenat Mahal, who manipulates him like,a puppet.

Prince Abu Zafar, the heir to the Mughal throne, has a vile rival in **Miiza** Jehangir, son of Queen Mumtaz Mahal, who has prevailed upon the aging Emperor Akbar Shah to prefer Jehangir to succeed him. However, neither the Emperor's open preference **nor** Queen Mumtaz Mahal Begum's surreptitious generosity avail Jehangir in his determination to eliminate Abu **Zafar's** rivalry. The British authorities make no secret **of** their preference

for Abu **Zafar**. In his **frustration**, Jehangir makes several sly attempts on Abu **Zafar's** life. In one of them, a tray of Abu **Zafar's** favourite *karela* lozenges are sent to him, but his **slave girl Waheeda** saves Abu Zafar's life by warning him that each little lozenge contains enough finely powdered glass **to kill a man (Khosla, Mughal 6-11)**.

Abu Zafar, after a vexatious confrontation with Jehangir, in which he could have easily killed his younger rival, but did not, turns his thoughts to the slave girl Waheeda, shy, coy and daring in turn. **As** he enters his private chamber, Waheeda, who has already heard of the sword fight between him and Jehangir, is all concern and solicitation. She fusses over him, skipping around him with her "rich and luscious body, **so** full of warmth and exciting mysteries," and speaking in **her thin** piping **voice— The** voice of a child unripe for a lover's embrace." Abu Zafar is **pleased** and fondles her body. When Waheeda tells him that his wife has wished to be excused from being present at breakfast because of a headache, Abu Zafar dismisses thoughts of his **Begum** and asks for only Waheeda's company. He asks her to make him forget Jehangir and his doings by singing a **ghazal** of his own composition. She obliges and charms him by her skilful display of passion and seduction and Abu **Zafar's** cup of love overflows (Khosla, *Mughal* 17-19).

When the British arrest Jehangir and deport him to Allahabad for his attempt on the life of the British Resident, Archibald Seton, Abu Zafar, spying an opportunity of ingratiating himself in his father's favour by protesting against this British infringement of Mughal imperial prerogatives,

seeks an audience with the Emperor. The next morning, going to the Diwan-i-Khas, the Hall of Special Audience, he finds Akbar the Second wearing durbar robes, indicating that it is a formal audience rather than an intimate dialogue, between father and son. Moreover, Abu Zafar knows that, behind the curtain behind the throne, are seated three female adversaries of his—the King's favourite queen and Jehangir's mother Mumtaz Mahal Begum, the King's mother Qudsia Begum and his paternal aunt Daulat un-Nissa Begum, "the three women who held Akbar completely under their influence and ruled, the Palace." Everyone knows that the King's "weak and pliant mind was shaped and moulded by the caprices of these three ladies," who were all "of one mind in their deep dislike of Abu Zafar" and who all "doted upon Jehangir, the young and handsome rake" (Khosla, *Mughal* .19-20).

The King mentions the encounter between Abu Zafar and Jehangir and the forcible removal of the latter from the Palace and attributes part of the blame to the former. From behind the curtain, the King's mother Qudsia Begum says that all this happened because Abu Zafar, with unfilial ingratitude, resiled from the document he willingly signed, renouncing his right to the throne. Abu Zafar pleads that he was forced to sign, the document and did not sign it of his free will, that Seton, perturbed by this happening, questioned him closely on the whole affair, and that it was impossible for him to dissemble or utter falsehoods. Mumtaz Mahal Begum interrupts to say that they know what he told the British Resident, that he

did not hesitate to accuse His Majesty of being a liar, and that the Resident had the impertinence to suggest an enquiry. Abu Zafar is enraged at this, because he perceives **that** Mumtaz Mahal Begum is not referring to his renunciation of his rights and his subsequent recantation of it, but **to** a sordid episode wherein the King, in a desperate **attempt** to convince the British authorities of Abu **Zafar**'s unworthiness to ascend the Mughal throne, wrote to the British Resident that he had committed incest **with** one of his young step-mothers, a young girl of his father's harem, making Abu Zafar weep with chagrin and tell the British Resident that the villainous calumny was part of the constant designs of the three ladies against him, which induced the Resident to recommend an enquiry into the truth or otherwise of the accusation, which, however, the King vehemently opposed, categorically refusing to submit himself to such an indignity. The King's aunt Daulat **un-Nissa** Begum rubs **salt** into Abu **Zafar's** wound by pointing out that he rushed unduly to withdraw his solemn renunciation. Taxed to his emotional breaking point by the combined onslaught of the three ladies and the pliant King, Abu Zafar asserts that he never truly renounced his rights and that, as the King's eldest son, **he is** entitled to be recognised as **Waliahad** (Khosla, *Mughal* 20-22).

The King is so firmly under the control of the three scheming women behind the curtain that he ridicules Abu **Zafar's** assertion of his rights and proceeds to teach him a lesson on Islamic law and **Timurid** custom with special reference to the succession to the throne (Khosla, *Mughal* 22).

Backing out from the royal presence, Abu Zafar knows that the King's speech and actions are all prompted by the three women behind the curtain. He remembers how, a year ago, the King, yielding to the persistent nagging of Mumtaz Mahal Begum, announced a date for the formal installation of her son Jehangir as Heir Apparent and communicated his decision to the Governor-General through a haughty *kharita*, official letter. The Governor-General took umbrage at the "pretentious revival of archaic phraseology" and categorically refused to recognise Jehangir's appointment. The British Resident was instructed not to attend the proposed ceremony of installation. The rebuff had the desired effect, for the proposed ceremony was cancelled (Khosla, *Mughal* 23).

Archibald Seton tells the Emperor that the British are ready to allow Prince Jehangir to return to Delhi from, his exile in Allahabad, provided, he submits himself in writing to some restrictions. Upon this, Mumtaz Mahal Begum, Qudsia Begum and Daulat-un-Nissa Begum protest together that it is an affront to the royal family to require any prince to execute a written document. Seton ignores their protest and hands over a draft to the King. One of the restrictions is that Prince Jehangir will not receive any money from the royal revenues of Mumtaz Mahal Begum. The King approves of the draft (Khosla, *Mughal* 39-43).

Prince Jehangir, however, has not changed a bit. He slides back into his unbridled ways soon. One of Abu Zafar's wives complains that Jehangir climbed, on to the roof of his apartment from where he gazed down

into the *Waliahcxfs zenana* and made obscene gestures. Mumtaz Mahal . Begum arranges a hurried marriage and provides Jehangir with a charming young bride, but Prince Jehangir cannot be lured away from his wild exploits. As Jehangir's misdemeanours increase,' Seton calls on the King and tells him that the only feasible course open seemed to be to send Jehangir to Allahabad again. For the benefit of Mumtaz Mahal Begum, who is seated behind the curtain at the King's back, listening to every word, Seton argues that the Company is concerned about the safety of the Heir Apparent; affecting the future of the House of Timur and about the,peace and tranquillity of the city (Khosla, *Mughal* 48-49). Seton then speaks of the part played by the Queen in this affair:

“Your Majesty will forgive me ... if I draw your attention to a matter which has reached the ears of the Governor-General, a matter of which he has taken serious notice,, in reference to which he has expressed his sentiment of the strongest disapproval. I was obliged to report to him that Her Majesty, Mumtaz Mahal. Begum, continues to furnish the Prince with considerable sums of money, far in excess of his sanctioned stipend, and the Prince is thus enabled to indulge in excesses which have darkened the glory of the Palace, and brought disrepute to Your Majesty's name.”

(Khosla, *Mughal* 49-50)

The King sends for Prince Jehangir and reprimands him. Jehangir, who has come to the audience drunk, ridicules the King for his vacillation,

for favouring the seducer of **his** royal consort, for **being prevailed** upon by his mother and for being a pawn in the hands of the Resident and leaves the royal presence unceremoniously. The King agrees to Seton's suggestion to send Prince Jehangir back to Allahabad (Khosla, *Mughal* 50-51).

Towards the end of March, a young girl, of whom Jehangir became enamoured during his sojourn in Delhi, gives birth to a son. The King and Mumtaz Mahal Begum drop all pretence and hail the event with great rejoicing and celebration. They declare that the young infant is heir to the throne of Delhi. They shower their affection upon him in the most ostentatious manner, smothering him with gifts, presents of clothes, jewellery and toys. They want Abu Zafar to know that it is their heart's desire to exalt Jehangir by cherishing his representative in the royal household and abusing Abu Zafar, the usurping rival (Khosla, *Mughal* 53).

The following winter, the new Resident, Charles Metcalfe, meets the King in connection with Jehangir's application to return to Delhi and protests against the undue fuss being made of the child of Prince Jehangir bom of a concubine. He points out that he has had to intervene to prevent the institution of a separate establishment for this infant. He also points out that the infant has been named Bahadur Shah, a title assumed by the head of the reigning branch of the House of Timur. The King points out that Mumtaz Mahal Begum has been reduced to utter unhappiness by being separated from her son. Listing a few more misdeeds of Prince Jehangir, Metcalfe says that he must continue to remain at Allahabad. The King

cannot but agree to this (Khosla, *Mughal* 57-62).

In July 1821, Mumtaz Mahal Begum and the King are tortured by grief upon learning that Prince Jehangir is seriously ill at Allahabad. They accuse Abu Zafar of being directly responsible for their son's suffering. Abu Zafar protests his innocence and pleads that Prince Jehangir be sent for at once. However, before this can be done, Prince Jehangir dies at Allahabad (Khosla, *Mughal* 62).

With Jehangir's death, Mumtaz Mahal Begum and the King transfer their love and favours to his younger brother Prince Babar. However, in 1825, Prince Babar dies after a brief illness (Khosla, *Mughal* 64-69).

Determined, obviously under Mumtaz Mahal Begum's influence, to dethrone Abu Zafar from the position of *Waliahad*, the King, at the ripe old age of eighty, and sensing the approach of death, asks his trusted mukhtar Sohan Lai to find a solution to the problem. Sohan Lai points out that, if the King bases himself on Islamic Law and pleads religious infringement, the British will, be moved to oblige him. So he suggests that a *mahzar* or authoritative declaration be signed by a body of eminent and learned divines. Sohan Lai has arranged everything. If the King goes to the Jama Masjid the next day, the *maulvis* will issue the *mahzar*. Learning of the plot, Abu Zafar seeks an audience with the King, but is denied one. So Abu Zafar sends a complaint to the Governor-General (Khosla, *Mughal* 74-75).

It is reported that the King signed a dower-deed in favour of Mumtaz Mahal Begum acknowledging a liability of five lakh rupees and executed a

bond agreeing to pay a non-existent loan of a similar sum. This liability of ten lakhs has been made a charge on the King's personal property so that, when Abu Zafar ascends the throne, he will find the treasury empty and his estate insolvent. Abu Zafar sends a complaint about this to the Governor-General. He receives a reply reassuring him that he need fear nothing from the machinations of his enemies (Khosla, *Mughal* 78-79).

In 1837, when the King is eighty-two, he falls ill and the end seems to be approaching. Abu Zafar wants to pay a visit of sympathy, but Mumtaz Mahal Begum refuses permission. On September 28, the King is reported to be sinking. Queen Mumtaz Mahal Begum, sits behind a curtain draped along the side of the bed, moaning and sobbing. The King dies and Abu Zafar ascends the throne as Bahadur Shah (Khosla, *Mughal* 79-82).

At the age of sixty-five, Emperor Bahadur Shah falls in love with a Kathak dancer of seventeen, charmed by her exquisite dancing. He commands that the girl be brought to his apartments. He takes from Hakim Ahsanullah Khan a phial of a powerful aphrodisiac (Khosla, *Mughal* 89-90), Emperor Bahadur Shah finds Zeenat Mahal Begum quite desirable and makes her his latest Queen (Khosla, *Mughal* 91).

Bahadur Shah feels rejuvenated and will not need the assistance of the hakim's aphrodisiac. He addresses Zeenat Mahal Begum as Queen and leads her to a couch. Once in bed, however, he feels old and exhausted. He thinks that the vigour of youth is gone, though the desire remains. He confesses to Zeenat Mahal Begum that he is old but that her embrace will

make him a youth again. Zeenat Mahal Begum plays up to his ego and says that he is not old since he has just now given proof of his youthful vigour. She hopes that their common wish for a son will be fulfilled by God's grace. She also hopes that her son will be heir to the royal throne. Bahadur Shah has eight living sons and looks upon all of them as his legitimate offspring, though the mother of only one was married to him strictly in accordance with Muslim rites. So Zeenat Mahal Begum's wish surprises him. She now demands a promise from him that their son will be the *Waliahad*. Bahadur Shah answers evasively (Khosla, *Mughal* 91-93).

Within two years, Zeenat Mahal Begum establishes herself as the favourite queen and counsellor of Bahadur Shah. She has promptly produced a son and the young Prince Jawan Bakht provides flattering proof of Bahadur Shah's virile performance on the wedding night (Khosla, *Mughal* 93).

Zeenat Mahal Begum works diligently to consolidate her power. In the first few months of her marriage, she observed the manner in which the royal household was managed and the King's monthly stipend dispensed by Mughal Beg, who was a low-caste weaver. He was caught stealing royal jewels and funds, and was replaced by Hamid Ali, a young man of gentle birth. Hamid Ali was honest and diligent, but too independent and intractable to Zeenat Mahal Begum's wishes. So she was looking for an opportunity to replace Hamid Ali with someone who would be more amenable to her wishes and demands. She herself would have liked to

become the King's mukhtar and to manage the royal finances and the Palace household, but, being a woman, she could not do it. It was not also possible for a woman in the King's harem to have direct communication with a man. So she hit upon the idea of inducting a eunuch from her father's household, named Mahboob Ali Khan (Khosla, *Mughal* 93-95).

Zeenat Mahal Begum makes Mahboob Ali Khan a member of the King's establishment with the task of acting as messenger between Hamid Ali and the Queen, However, very soon, he begins to advise the King on financial matters. He also takes upon himself the task of exposing the King's dishonest servants and punishing them with his approval. Thereby Mahboob Ali Khan makes himself indispensable to the King and Hamid Ali, because he spares them many unpleasant scenes and also prevents many minor leakages of the royal revenues. He gives constant proof of his loyalty, honesty and incorruptible sense of duty. Zeenat Mahal Begum wishes to make Mahboob Ali Khan the King's mukhtar, but is prevented by the King's great regard for, Hamid Ali and by Mahboob Khan's near illiteracy. The eunuch cannot compose the complex and polished phraseology of Court correspondence. The British Resident, who has to approve the appointment of the King's mukhtar, may, on this ground, refuse to consider the claims of the eunuch. So Zeenat Mahal Begum, on the advice of her father, employs Maulvi Imam Ali, a learned scholar, to teach Mahboob Ali Khan. When the eunuch becomes proficient in Persian, Zeenat Mahal Begum, utilising Hamid Ali's absence from the Palace, persuades the King through her

womanly **charm** and craft to appoint her **mukhtar-in-chief**, so that she can relieve the King of all worries and anxieties regarding the royal household, which is being robbed systematically. She also convinces the King that the eunuch **Mahboob** Ali Khan is the most suitable person to assist her in handling the royal affairs. The King consents and the British Resident approves the appointment of Mahboob Ali Khan as the King's mukhtar (Khosla, *Mughal* 95-98).

Zeenat Mahal Begum congratulates herself and feels gratified by the success of her efforts because, as mukhtar-in-chief, she can, rightly take a greater and more intimate interest in the King's affairs, financial as well as political, and exercise her influence as Queen and counsellor to greater effect. Being an ambitious woman, she begins to study the King's true status and the extent of his powers from the very first day of her new status. She discovers that the King is not really rich, that he is little better than a prisoner in the Red Fort, that he is completely under the power of the British Resident and other British officials and that he cannot go anywhere beyond the walls of the Red Fort without the Resident's permission. The King is kept happy with high-sounding titles, pomp, colour, noise, mock-rich **furnishings** and trappings and varieties of food and dishes. The Palace overflows with a multitude of servants and attendants and numberless household departments, each in the charge of an officer. The King's durbars and ceremonial functions, his gifts to holy mendicants and fakirs, his patronage of poets, painters and calligraphists, his fighting cocks and

partridges and his horses all drain his monthly stipend of one lakh rupees, of which only sixty thousand rupees are meant for his personal use. The " money is not sufficient to maintain all the pomp and munificence. Moreover, the Palace is in need of extensive repairs, the *salateem* are rapidly increasing in number and deteriorating in poverty, and there are heavy debts due to the citizens (Khosla, *Mughal* 99-100).

Zeenat Mahal Begum speaks to Bahadur Shah about the royal finances and seeks to find ways of improving them. She also learns from Hakim Ahsanullah Khan the history of Indo-British relations with reference to the Mughal kingdom, particularly of the eighty-year period of futile straggle between three successive Mughal emperors and the British power in India, starting with the British giving protection to Shah Alam, in return for which he granted the British East India Company Dewani rights over Bengal, Bihar and part of Orissa. But, gradually, the British assumed greater powers and reduced the status of the Emperor to that of an imprisoned, pensioner, resisting every effort by successive emperors to reassert imperial power and treat the British as subjects. Bahadur Shah makes it very clear to Zeenat Mahal Begum that the royal prerogatives and claims of the Mughals, though currently defunct and inoperable, are sacred and inalienable and cannot be renounced in any circumstances. Now Zeenat Mahal Begum has acquired a full grasp of past imperatives and current realities (Khosla, *Mughal* 100-07).

The dedication with which Zeenat Mahal Begum learns of the past and

the commitment with, which she enquires into the present please Bahadur Shah into telling her all the details required by her to understand the situation and proceed appropriately. **At** the end of her long session of learning, she reverts to her role as the King's most charming queen and induces him to beg for her favourite devices of **titillation**. Zeenat Mahal Begum readily obliges, for this is the easiest way to increase her power over **the** old emperor (Khosla, *Mughal* 106-07).

The *Waliahad*, **Dara Baksh**, is reported to be ill. The next **living** son of the Emperor, Fakharuddin, is not a favourite of Bahadur Shah's. So the news of Dara **Baksh's** illness revives Zeenat Mahal Begum's **aspirations** for her son **Jawan Bakht**. Dara Baksh dies in his sleep. The next day Zeenat Mahal Begum develops a cold and Bahadur Shah, suggests a change of air and proposes a hunting expedition to **Mehrauli** (Khosla, *Mughal* 112).

**At Mehrauli, Zeenat Mahal Begum mauls Bahadur Shah's increasingly unresponsive body, making him alternately shiver with excitement and sigh with satisfaction, importuning him simultaneously to press for recognition of Jawan Bakht as *Waliahad*. Bahadur Shah advises patience. But Zeenat Mahal Begum cautions him against Fakharuddin's intrigues to secure the recognition for himself. Tired of her pestering, Bahadur Shah says that he will consult Hakim Ahsanullah Khan the next day. Zeenat Mahal Begum makes a face and leaves the King to sleep** (Khosla, *Mughal* 114).

**Later in the day, her personal female attendant hands her an unripe mango and a petition from Fakharuddin to the King. Zeenat Mahal Begum**

interprets the **unripe** mango to be a challenge, a symbolic threat and a declaration that the time for the fruition of his hopes is not yet ripe. She complains to the King and urges the urgency of pushing forward **Jawan Bakht's** claim. She sends for Hakim **Ahsanullah** Khan and suggests that **Fakharuddin** may make a deal for part of the *Waliahad's* stipend to secure it. She urges immediate action. The Hakim agrees **with** her (Khosla, *Mughal* 114).

After their return to the Palace, Zeenat Mahal Begum bursts into Bahadur Shah's chamber and complains that she has been, horribly wronged and humiliated by Fakharuddin. She explains that, contrary to protocol, Fakharuddin had his elephant placed in advance of her canopy as if he were already the *Waliahad* and that the whole world was witness to her shame. She ends her complaint with a flood of tears. As suggested by her, Bahadur Shah, checks with the Commandant of the Palace Guards, but he says that he noticed nothing unusual or untoward. To placate Zeenat Mahal Begum, Bahadur Shah dismisses Fakharuddin's mahout, who, however, is pardoned after two days and readmitted to service. Again Zeenat Mahal Begum urges that Jawan Bakht's claim should be pressed and points to the attitude of the Commandant of the Palace Guards as proof of British bias. So Bahadur Shah asks Hakim Ahsanullah Khan to prepare a *kharita*. He does so, stating the King's choice of Jawan Bakht as *Waliahad* and asserting his suitability for the position. The *kharita* is explained to Zeenat Mahal Begum and she is satisfied with it (Khosla, *Mughal* 120-22). Learning of this, Fakharuddin

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sends his claim to the British, highlighting his princely qualifications and Jawan Bakht's low-born disqualification. Lord Dalhousie sees no reason to maintain the dynasty even in name, since the house of Timur no longer possesses the paramountcy and so he refuses to recognise Fakharuddin as Heir Apparent (Khosla, *Mughal* 122-23).

Bahadur Shah wallows in self-pity, because Zeenat Mahal Begum is more concerned with her status and the power she can wield than with what pleases him as her husband and King. To please her, he builds a palace for her at Lai Kua. She invites him to her palace as her guest. He agrees to visit her palace. But, to his chagrin, she takes cart-loads of carpets, furnishings, utensils and linen from the royal Palace, depleting the royal property. On the day of his visit, she drives out of the Red Fort in great style and with great fanfare, befitting her popular nickname of *Danka Begum*, or Dram Beating Queen, and goes to her palace at Lai Kua. The King follows her to her palace, only to discover that the whole affair was not meant to honour him, but to advertise and flaunt her own importance and the power she exercises. The frustration and the bitterness of the King are aggravated by a newspaper report that the visit cost Rs.20,000/- and a taunt that the King has been reduced to the level of a subject (Khosla, *Mughal* 124-25).

Bahadur Shah's cup of suffering and self-condemnation is made to overflow by the licentious conduct of Zeenat Mahal Begum's half-sister, Taj Mahal Begum, a thorn he has taken on himself because of his own carnality

(Khosla, *Mughal* 126-27).

The British Agent asks for a complete list of Bahadur Shah's living sons, their ages and details of their mothers. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan shows the list he has prepared in response. Bahadur Shah takes it and corrects it to place Jawan Bakht's name at the top and Fakharuddin's at the bottom. He adds that Fakharuddin is the son of "a sayyadani concubine," to ensure that the British will not consider Fakharuddin for recognition as the *Waliahad* (Khosla, *Mughal* 132-34).

One day, the British Agent tells Bahadur Shah that he has received a report from a reliable source in the Palace that some of the Crown jewels and other valuable articles have been removed from the *toshakhana* or store-room by Zeenat Mahal Begum, with the complicity of Mahboob Ali Khan. She vehemently denies the charge and challenges that the Crown jewels be counted and tallied against the official, list. She charges Fakharuddin with having venomously calumniated her. The King at once sends for Fakharuddin. and berates him, calling him the offspring of a woman who was a low-born slut. Fakharuddin denies having made any report to the Agent. Zeenat Mahal Begum insists that only Fakharuddin could have invented such a lie. The King publicly disowns Fakharuddin. A few days later, however, upon hearing a rumour that the British Government has decided to recognise Fakharuddin as Heir Apparent, Bahadur Shah declares that Fakharuddin is the light of his eyes, his flesh and blood, and his worthy successor. But, the next day he holds a durbar and makes a public

announcement that he has disinherited Fakharuddin and that, therefore, Fakharuddin can no longer claim any right, title or property which vests in the Emperor. He challenges the British Government to disregard the momentous announcement. Fakharuddin is subjected to several public indignities. He complains to the British Agent, who pressurises Bahadur Shah. Upon learning of this, Zeenat Mahal Begum rages against the Agent and Fakharuddin and taunts Bahadur Shah, saying that the imperious dynasty of Timur has been reduced by the perfidious British traders to empty majesty. The Emperor is stung and refuses to pay Fakharuddin his stipend and, in case the Agent chooses to pay Fakharuddin directly, he threatens to refuse the entire imperial pension (Khosla, *Mughal* 135-37).

Towards the end of September, the British Agent informs Bahadur Shah that the Governor-General has passed orders recognising Fakharuddin as Heir Apparent and successor to Bahadur Shah. Zeenat Mahal Begum appeals to the King to do something for her and her son, so that they should be able to live in security and comfort after his death. Bahadur Shah recalls that, on his installation as Heir Apparent, he was forced to sign some documents to guarantee the well-being of his step-mother and step-brother and asks Hakim Ahsanullah Khan to trace them so that Fakharuddin can be asked to sign similar documents to guarantee the well-being of Zeenat Mahal Begum and her son Jawan Bakht. But Fakharuddin bluntly refuses to enter into any future commitments (Khosla, *Mughal* 138-39).

However, Zeenat Mahal Begum refuses to accept defeat. She is

**determined** to find a way to rout her enemies. Unfortunately, her staunchest ally, **Mahboob** Ali Khan, has failed **to** exploit his authority as mukhtar adequately. Of late he has even been complaining that the King has **withdrawn** the confidence once reposed in him. She now confers with Mahboob Ali Khan to find a way to save themselves from defeat and ignominy. She says that they cannot sit idle and feel the earth slipping away from under their feet. She lists the four impediments that they must remove from their path. They are: Thomas Metcalfe, the British Agent at Delhi, who did not accept the Emperor's claim to nominate the *Waliahad* and was the first to write in favour of Fakharuddin; James Thomason, the Lieutenant-Governor through whom all letters and despatches are sent and who strongly supported the Agent's recommendations; Elliot, the Governor-General's Secretary, who received Thomason's despatch and put it up to the Governor-General and also supported Fakharuddin, after which the Governor-General could not accept the King's claim; and, Fakharuddin himself, the biggest mountain in their way. She instructs Mahboob Ali Khan to go to her physician Imamuddin, who will advise him what to do. She has already spoken to Imamuddin and has complete faith in him (Khosla, *Mughal* 143-45).

An unanticipated turn of events deepens Zeenat Mahal Begum's gloom and taxes her ingenuity and determination further. Prince Hyder Shikoh, Bahadur Shah's cousin, arrives from Lucknow, and, learning of the Emperor's difficulties with his servants, particularly with Ms mukhtar

Mahboob Ali Khan, offers to end the Emperor's problems by bringing Seth Govind Chand, a wealthy merchant of Lucknow, to serve as the Emperor's mukhtar in the place of the eunuch. Zeenat Mahal Begum vehemently opposes the change. She argues that Mahboob Ali Khan has given her complete satisfaction, that she cannot now deal with a new assistant and that she cannot converse with, and give directions to a man. She adds that, being a stranger, the Seth must be ignorant of Palace customs and household management. Finally she says that she has spent Rs. 1,75,000/- from her own funds and that this debt must be discharged before the Seth is appointed mukhtar. The King is enraged because he cannot, without openly accusing her of dishonesty, ask where so much money was spent, how she raised it and why he was not informed of the transaction till now. As soon as Zeenat Mahal Begum leaves, Bahadur Shah sends for Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and has a letter sent to the Agent informing him of the appointment of Seth Govind Chand as the King's mukhtar. Then Bahadur Shah goes to the apartments of Akhtar Mahal Begum, a young and vivacious girl whom, he introduced into the royal harem two years ago. He is pleased with the welcome he receives and remains with her till a late hour (Khosla, *Mughal* 145-47).

Seth Govind Chand arrives, but only installs his son Gopal Chand as his representative. Gopal Chand promptly asks Mahboob Ali Khan for a list of the Palace servants and the amounts of their salaries. Mahboob Ali Khan first hedges and then demands reimbursement of some expenditure incurred

by him on royal work as a pre-condition. The King explodes in rage and questions Mahboob Ali Khan's integrity. He also says that Zeenat Mahal Begum has no money except what she has taken from the royal treasury. He declares that the whole account is a fraud. Zeenat Mahal Begum and Mahboob Ali Khan create several more problems for the Seth, making it almost impossible for him to function as mukhtar. Finally the frustrated Seth begs leave to go home. At this the King publicly declares that henceforth the Seth will exclusively deal with the affairs of the Palace (Khosla, *Mughal* 147-49).

Upon hearing of this, Zeenat Mahal Begum leaves the Palace, taking Jawan Bakht with her. No one knows where she has gone. The King is distracted and spends a sleepless night. The next day, hearing that she has returned, he goes to her apartments. Zeenat Mahal Begum throws a tantrum, bewailing her lot—leading a miserable life, a queen only in name, without power, rank or dignity, and not enjoying the trust and confidence of her royal spouse. She charges the Seth of falsely accusing the truthful Mahboob Ali Khan and with casting aspersions on her. Throwing herself on her bed and shaking with sobs and cries of anguish, she asks, the King to promise to dismiss the Seth and reinstate Mahboob Ali Khan as mukhtar under her control. Bahadur Shah is forced to concede her demand (Khosla *Mughal* 149-50).

The next morning, Mahboob Ali Khan is directed to resume exclusive charge of the household affairs. Orders are issued denying Seth Gopal

Gland access to the Palace. Mahboob Ali Khan humiliates and mortifies Ms defeated rival. The Seth demands reimbursement of the expenses incurred by him in the past one month. Mahboob Ali Khan complicates the accounts and offers unacceptable terms. As a result the Seth has to wait in Delhi for six months merely to obtain the King's permission to leave (Khosla, *Mughal* 150-55).

A messenger brings the news that Lieutenant-Governor Thomason has died of fever and diarrhea. He suddenly took ill while on a tour and died after suffering for five days. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, when summoned to prepare a letter of condolence, arrives with the news that the British Agent Metcalfe is seriously ill. A week later Metcalfe also dies. Zeenat Mahal Begum, rejoices over the death of her enemies who laboured to deny her son Ms rights. Bahadur Shah cautions her that the British have spies everywhere and he also mentions rampant rumours. Zeenat Mahal Begum declares that she did not poison them but she is happy that someone did so. A few days later news arrives that Elliot, who was sailing home, took ill on board and died on board the ship. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan reports rumours of a European physician's opinion that all the three British officers were poisoned and that Fakharuddin should be careful about what he eats and where he dines (Khosla, *Mughal* 155-57).

Three years later, one day, Fakharuddin suddenly falls ill with the same symptoms as Thomason and Metcalfe. The hakim diagnoses the malady as cholera, of which a few cases have occurred in the city. Fakharuddin dies

after five days. It is whispered as an open secret that Zeenat Mahal Begum, with the help of her family physician, Hakim Naqi Khan, poisoned Fakharuddin. When the new British Agent visits the Palace the day after Fakharuddin's death, the King hands him a written request to declare Jawan Bakht Heir Apparent. It is accompanied by a document signed by eight of the King's sons, expressing their concurrence with the King's request. The Agent is greatly surprised and promises to refer the matter to higher authorities. The next day, Prince Koaish, now the eldest of the King's sons, writes to the Agent retracting his consent and alleging that the eight princes were pressurised and induced by the King into signing the document. He says that the King did so at the instigation of Zeenat Mahal Begum. As Prince Koaish waits hopefully, the year 1857 dawns (Khosla, *Mughal* 157-58).

On the morning of 11 May 1857 the Sepoy Mutiny breaks out. At the first sign, of trouble, Bahadur Shah longs to go and talk to Zeenat Mahal Begum, who will comfort and soothe him and lift the fear from his head, and rushes into his apartments. An agitated maid servant intrudes and says that several sepoys and cavalrymen have entered the Palace and are clamouring to see the King. Bahadur Shah's fear intensifies, but Zeenat Mahal Begum reassures him that the mob means him no harm. She advises him to go to them with Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and Vakil Ghulam Abbas. He does so and warns the sepoys of British retribution. The sepoys ask for his blessings for their revolt against British tyranny. Bahadur Shah blesses

them and they leave (Khosla, *Mughal* 169-77).

Going back to his private apartments, Bahadur Shah lets Zeenat Mahal Begum soothe his fears and nerves. **Mahboob Ali Khan arrives and** reports that a large number of English women and children have been brought into **the** Palace and that the sepoys from Meerut are clamouring to slaughter **them**. The King orders that the white prisoners be given food and . protection. He decides to go personally to the white women and assure , them of his protection and also to send a message to the Lieutenant-Governor at Agra. He consults Zeenat Mahal Begum. She agrees with him, but counsels him to be discreet and wary, not letting the sepoys know or feel that he has doubts about their ultimate victory. She is sure that they **will** obey him, provided he does not openly declare himself against them. Bahadur Shah perceives the wisdom of Zeenat Mahal Begum's advice, which reminds him of his grandfather Shah **Alam's** wisdom. So he decides to send a secret message for help to the Lieutenant-Governor **and, at the** same time, maintain a discreet appearance *vis-a-vis* the rebellious sepoys **(Khosla, *Mughal* 178-81)**.

The rebellious sepoys complain that Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and Mahboob Ali Khan are playing a double game, colluding with the British on the condition that they recognise Jawan Bakht as Heir Apparent. The exertions necessitated by trying to maintain some level of order in the city tire Bahadur Shah beyond endurance. Zeenat Mahal Begum comes to him and soothes him with her caresses and infuses courage into him.



Strengthened by her words, Bahadur Shah conducts a durbar. When the British lay siege to Delhi, most of the servants desert the Palace. An adventurer named Bakht Khan, who had been made a commander, offers to take the Emperor safely to Lucknow from where they can continue the fight. Emperor Bahadur Shah shakes his head in despair (Khosla, *Mughal* 193-214).

Perceiving that the end of the resistance is nearing, Bahadur Shah sends Zeenat Mahal Begum and Jawan Bakht to the house in Lai Kua. He himself proceeds to Humayun's tomb, where some of his princes are waiting for him. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan joins him there and informs him that he has been trying to obtain honourable terms for him from the British, duly supported by Zeenat Mahal Begum (Khosla, *Mughal* 215-17).

Some hours later, Ilahi Baksh, Fakharuddin's father-in-law, brings an order from the British, guaranteeing the safety of Emperor Bahadur Shah, Queen Zeenat Mahal Begum and Prince Jawan Bakht. The British have sent a palanquin, to take the Emperor to Lai Kua. He is to remain in Zeenat Mahal Begum's palace till the Governor-General passes further orders in respect of his future. Emperor Bahadur Shah sees that he is now a prisoner of the victorious British army (Khosla, *Mughal* 217).

Chapter 4  
Royal Women, in British India

The novels that recreate British India are Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*, Gopalan's *Old Tanjore*, Modak's *Single Is the Wheel* and Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind*. The Indian rulers of British India faced constant threats from the British or from within their own kingdoms. In such circumstances their royal women were generally a constant source of strength and wise counsel

Gidwani's novel *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* presents two royal women: Fakhr-un-Nissa, the wife of Hyder Ali Khan, who was devoted to her all his life, and Ruqayya Banu the sweetheart, and later, wife of Tipu Sultan. Fakhr-un-Nissa plays a very important part in the formation of Tipu's character, while Ruqayya plays an equally important part in his later life by being a loving wife and faithful ally.

Fakhr-un-Nissa, wife of Hyder Ali Khan of Mysore, thinks not only of her husband and her son, but also of their subjects:

Most of her life passed by, waiting for them [Hyder and Tipu].  
When they came back with their trophies and treasures, with news of battles won and armies routed, she heard the lusty cheers of the multitude but she also counted the many who had not returned with them. Silently she would render thanks for their homecoming but would pray also for those lost on the battlefield

and for the widows and orphans left behind.... (Gidwani, *Tipu* 44)

Fakhr-un-Nissa is Hyder's second wife. His first wife, Shahbaz Begum, had persuaded him to remarry because she was a chronic patient and had produced only a daughter. When Fakhr-un-Nissa remained childless for two years after marriage, on her deathbed, Shahbaz Begum takes a promise from both Hyder and Fakhr-un-Nissa that they will go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the late saint Tipu Mastan Oulia in Arcot to seek the blessings of that holy man (Gidwani, *Tipu* 46).

Hyder Ali and Fakhr-un-Nissa go to the tomb of Saint Tipu Mastan Oulia to seek his blessings. Hyder bows perfunctorily and leaves soon after depositing a large offering. Fakhr-un-Nissa remains behind and prays fervently for seven days. The atmosphere of the shrine gives her a feeling of peace and contentment, but she does not like the rocky and barren surroundings. After speaking to the trustees and the caretakers of the shrine, she employs a labour force to plant a garden. As the work starts, the wild-looking putative son of Saint Tipu rushes out of the shrine and asks them why the peace of the shrine is being disturbed. Fakhr-un-Nissa tells him that she plans to plant flowering trees, which, she says, will please Saint Tipu. The young man races back to the shrine and returns after a few moments. He says that Saint Tipu will not be pleased because he does not want anything to be done for him by a woman. He asks her to send her son if she wants flowers to be planted. Fakhr-un-Nissa pleads that she has no

son and wonders if her husband can be sent instead (Gidwani, *Tipu* 48-[49]).'

The young man replies: "I know, but you will. You will have more than one son. That is why you came here. Your prayers have been heard. Go now.... But what is the use of having sons, only to have them mown down in battle!" (Gidwani, *Tipu* [49]). It sounds like a curse and Fakhr-un-Nissa begs that they may live. He asks if she promises to deliver her first bom to God's service. Fakhr-un-Nissa fervently says that she will. He tells Fakhr-un-Nissa: "Go then in peace. Your first one will be a prince, a Sultan, a king amongst men. Let him know the ways of the Lord, so that he may cany his banner. Let him serve God and none else. Go." As he says this, all the wildness leaves him and his tone is soft but commanding so that Fakhr-un-Nissa feels the presence of someone else. She thanks him and kisses the hem of his robe. As she enters her palanquin to leave the shrine, the young man regains Ms wildness and shouts, "Your son is a Sultan, do you hear? Tipu says so." (Gidwani, *Tipu* [49J-50]).

Hyder is confused by Fakhr-un-Nissa's account of these happenings. But he says that their son will be called Tipu Sultan. Fakhr-un-Nissa reminds him that the son is to be brought up in the service of God. Hyder agrees to this, but he is impatient to have the son. Hyder says that if Ms son is to be named a Sultan, he himself cannot remain a junior commander, but must try to become a king. Fakhr-un-Nissa explains to Mm that the destiny of her son is to be a Sultan not in the earthly sense but in matters of spirit

and in the service of the Lord. Nine months after her first visit to the shrine, a son is born to Fakhr-un-Nissa at Devanhalli on Friday, 20 November 1750. He is named Tipu Sultan (Gidwani, *Tipu* 50-[52]).

After the birth of his son Tipu, Hyder, tutored by his friend Purnaiya, takes a close look at the state of the political affairs and perceives that kingship is going a-begging. He plays his cards carefully and competently under the guidance of Purnaiya and, overshadowing the king's ministers, who had already overshadowed the king, Hyder takes over supreme command of the Kingdom of Mysore (Gidwani, *Tipu* 55-59).

Hyder frequently jokes about his son Tipu having been promised to God's service, but Fakhr-un-Nissa takes her vow seriously, as is evident in the reserve with which she treats Tipu:

When Tipu was asleep, Fakhr-un-Nissa would kiss him from head to foot fervently and ardently. She would wait for him to go to sleep before hugging him passionately to her breast or kissing him on the lips but when he was awake, her kisses would be light and gentle—a mere caress of the cheek or the forehead—so timid and tender as if she was seeking his permission for the familiarity. Fixed in her mind was the thought that her little one was destined to serve the Lord. She had learned to honour seers and saints, and in her mind's eye her son was already the chosen one of the Lord. She did not therefore consider it strange that he should inspire in her feelings of respect and humility. But when he slept, she

surrendered to her hunger to smother him with loving kisses and wrap him in her arms. (Gidwani, *Tipu* [66])

Even in the midsummer heat, when most children are left naked or semi-naked, Fakhr-un-Nissa keeps Tipu fully clothed. Hyder remonstrates that people may suspect that Tipu has a physical deficiency if he is so meticulously covered from neck to foot all the while. However, Hyder guesses that Fakhr-un-Nissa, who has seen many fakirs and holy men walking around wrapped in nothing more than a loin cloth, perhaps does not wish Tipu. to get used to that kind of life-style when he attains holiness or wants him to make up now for all the privations of the future (Gidwani, *Tipu* 67).

Three years after the birth of Tipu, when they still have no other child, Hyder affectionately warns Fakhr-un-Nissa that unless she gives him another son, she cannot keep her word to God to give Tipu to. God's service. Fakhr-un-Nissa asks Hyder to be patient, to have faith and not to blaspheme (Gidwani, *Tipu* [69]). Hyder is constantly worried about how Tipu is to be prepared for God's service. When Tipu is four, and has begun instruction in reading and writing, Fakhr-un-Nissa suggests engaging a Muslim teacher to teach Tipu religion. But Hyder wants Tipu's religious teaching to be such that he can serve both Hindus and Muslims. Fakhr-un-Nissa agrees to this. So they decide to engage Maulvi Obedulla and Goverdhan Pandit (Gidwani, *Tipu* [70]-71).

Hyder wants Tipu to be trained in horse-riding, archery, musketry,

combat, marksmanship and military arts. He gives complicated justifications for imparting such training to Tipu. Fakhr-un-Nissa objects. Hyder explains that God may, despite their vow, reject Tipu for his service or she may not give birth to another son, in which latter case he will not surrender Tipu to God (Gidwani, *Tipu* 71-72).

'When Fakhr-un-Nissa is pregnant again, Hyder is appointed Faujdar or Commandant of **Dindigul**, where a strong man is needed to discipline refractory elements. Hyder goes to Dindigul with a small force and Fakhr-un-Nissa and the five-year-old Tipu. Hyder, who is in the vanguard, rides back to discipline Tipu, who is throwing a tantrum because he has been ordered to go into the palanquin in 'that hilly area. Soon the vanguard is ambushed and wiped out. Hyder, who has miraculously escaped with his life, rallies his soldiers and silences the opposition. Fakhr-un-Nissa delivers their second son Abdul Karim prematurely in the palanquin during the battle (Gidwani, *Tipu* [72J-73]).

Abdul Karim hovers between life and death for some weeks. Hyder and Fakhr-un-Nissa pray, but Tipu prays more. After some weeks, the physicians say that Abdul Karim is completely out of danger and will lead a strong and healthy life. Fakhr-un-Nissa recovers from the ordeal of premature birth. When Hyder speaks of a third child, she tells him of the doctors' verdict that she can bear no more children. She urges him to marry another wife and she shows him a list of prospective brides she has already prepared. The illiterate Hyder takes the paper from her and tears it to

pieces. He tells her angrily that she should never again mention remarriage and leaves her room (Gidwani, *Tipu* [75J-79]).

Maulvi Obedullah and Goverdhan Pandit take over as religious mentors with an express mission:

They were to give effect to Fakhr-un-Nissa's silent hopes that her son would not be a wandering fakir but a learned teacher, renowned and respected who would speak the word of God and his Gospel far and wide. She could picture in her mind's eye princes and pandits bowing before her son, in reverence and awe; and he dispensing enlightenment wherever he went. Hearts laden with grief would turn to him for solace and her son would be the healer, the teacher and .the pathfinder.... (Gidwani, *Tipu* [80])

When Abdul Karim is three years old, Fakhr-un-Nissa observes that his occasional pleasing smile, which spreads to his eyes and lights his face, turns into a grimace and finally into a twitch. She suspects that something is wrong with Karim. He is slow and lethargic, but, at times, he grows excited, as if under a spell. At such times, his .eyes take on a wild look, his hands tremble, Ms teeth are clenched and his forehead is wet with sweat. She prays to God and stifles her misgivings. But, when Karim's periods of frenzied excitement grow longer, she tells Hyder. After watching Karim, a shaken Hyder calls physicians from near and far. Special prayers are offered in mosques and temples. Holy men are invited and their blessings are invoked. Astrologers are called in. Fakhr-un-Nissa goes on a

pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Tipu Mastan Oulia and prays fervently. But Karim's condition only worsens. There is a period of hope during the Palace intrigue of 1760, when Karim behaves like a normal child enjoying adventures, parades and luxury. But, six months later, there is a relapse and Karim's behaviour during those spells is more shocking and violent than before. Hyder brings in physicians from Muscat, Persia and France, but, all to no avail. Finally, Hyder, who regards Karim's malady as God's wanton and purposeless cruelty, takes back his first son, twelve-year-old Tipu, whom, he had given to God's service. With that decision, Maulvi Obedullah and Goverdhan Pandit leave and Ghazi Khan becomes Tipu's sole tutor (Gidwani, *Tipu* [97]-100).

Confronted by the onerous burden of kingship amidst treachery, ambition and intrigues upon the death of his father Hyder, Tipu longs for the peace and sunshine of his early years. He recalls his first meeting with Ms wife Ruqayya Banu. The day after the rescue from the fort at Seringapatam during the Palace intrigue of 1760, Ghazi Khan hides Tipu and Karim in the dilapidated boat used for river-burial of children, which is docked at Simi, near Ms house. The horsemen who are to meet him there and take the two boys to safety do not turn up. So, the next day he leaves the boys in the boat and goes to his house. Reaching his house, he finds the police conducting a house-to-house search for the princes, whose escape has been discovered. Writing out a hurried note, Ghazi Khan opens his window and knocks at the window of the adjacent house of Lala Mian with a stick. Lala Mian's

seven-year-old daughter Ruqayya Banu opens the window. Since Lala Mian has gone out, Ghazi Khan gives the note to Ruqayya, after making her promise to faithfully give it to her father when he returns. By then the police, who have been knocking at his door for some time, force it open. They arrest Ghazi Khan. Ruqayya Banu sees Ghazi Khan being led away by the police (Gidwani, *Tipu* [116]-18).

When her parents return, Ruqayya gives her father Ghazi Khan's note. He reads it and his face falls. Ghazi Khan has asked him to take food to the two boys in the boat at Simi and to look after them. Lala Mian does not want to do so because, if caught, he will be hanged and he has children of his own to worry about. His wife protests that he has served Hyder and that Ghazi Khan is a friend of his. She is concerned about the two boys and the consequences of not helping them. Lala Mian says that they can plead that Ruqayya Banu forgot to deliver the note to him. In fact, he returns the note to Ruqayya and instructs her to say, in case she is questioned, that she forgot to give it to him. Ruqayya obeys him, but keeps worrying about the boys the whole day. That night, after her parents have gone to sleep, Ruqayya goes into the kitchen, stuffs bread, biscuits, pickles, jam and honey into a basket and creeps out of the house. Walking five miles barefooted and terrified in the dark, crying and praying all the time, Ruqayya reaches the boat (Gidwani, *Tipu* 118-19).

Ruqayya gives the basket to Tipu and asks the boys to eat. Tipu gives his handkerchief and the sobbing Ruqayya wipes her face with it. After the

boys eat the meal, the three of them eat the sweets Ruqayya has brought with her. Since she is afraid of returning in the dark, Tipu offers to take her home. But, since his danger is greater, she decides to pass the night in the boat. That is where Lala Mian finds her in the morning, sleeping in Tipu's arms, when, finding her missing from the house and the basket also missing from the kitchen, he guesses that Ruqayya must have taken food to the boys, and hurries to the river (Gidwani, *Tipu* 119-20).

Lala Mian is relieved to find his daughter safe. He asks her to come with him. Ruqayya asks the boys to come with them. They do so. Fortunately, it is the day of the Holi festival. Lala Mian goes to a shop selling Holi articles and buys coloured powders and face masks. They all play Holi. Soon their clothes and hair are multicoloured so that no one can recognise them. Lala Mian takes the three children to his house. Ruqayya's mother takes over. She bathes Karim and Ruqayya. Tipu cleans himself. Ruqayya's mother goes to a lady doing tailoring work and buys a suit of clothes to fit Tipu. Ruqayya claps her hands upon seeing Tipu in his new clothes, but says that he looked very handsome and very gallant in his tiger mask. Only then Tipu looks at the mask. He asks Lala Mian if he can keep the mask. Lala Mian offers to get him a new one not spoilt by the Holi colours. But Tipu insists on taking only the coloured mask (Gidwani, *Tipu* 120-23).

Throughout that day Ruqayya makes Tipu wear the tiger mask again and again and the three children invent a game to play together. In the

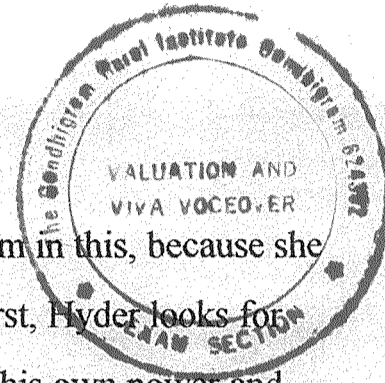
evening, after Karim goes to sleep, Tipu and **Ruqayya** sit together, holding hands. They are both very happy. Late in the evening, Ghazi Khan, who has been released after questioning by the police, returns home. He is happy to find **the** boys safe and **sleeping in Lala Mian's** house. **Lai a Mian** suggests dressing the boys as girls and placing them in a litter joining the marriage procession of Seth Devi **Dayal's** son the next afternoon. Accordingly, the next afternoon, Ghazi .Khan goes out of the city ahead of the marriage procession and arranges horses. Lala Mian puts the two boys in a litter along with himself and they join the marriage procession. Some hours later, they are out of the city. Ghazi **Khan** meets them there, and takes over the boys (Gidwani, *Tipu* 123-26).

Seven years after this escapade, **in 1767**, when Tipu is seventeen years old, he wins a resounding victory over the English army of Joseph Smith, at **Vaniyambadi. He follows it up by routing the English at Mangalore.** In the course of **the next two years, he inflicts such defeats on the English that, in 1769, Hyder is able to dictate peace terms to the English before the very gates of Madras. Now Hyder asks Tipu to have a battle flag and banner of his own. Tipu wants a tiger as his emblem on his battle flag. Hyder agrees and, from that day, the tiger becomes the symbol and emblem of Tipu, embellishing his flags, banners, guns, clothes and coins. Ruqayya's words were the inspiration for Tipu's choice of the tiger as his emblem (Gidwani, *Tipu* 126-28).**

**Hyder comes out victorious in the Palace intrigue and takes over**

undisputed command of the Kingdom of Mysore. He goes to the dilapidated boat on the river at Simi. The basket brought by Ruqayya is still in the boat. Tipu wants **to** keep the basket. Hyder has a replica **of** the basket made in gold and goes to Lala Mian's house with **Fakhr-un-Nissa** and **the** two boys. He kisses **Ruqayya** and, gives the golden basket to her in exchange for her basket, which Tipu wants to keep. Lala **Mian's** family is showered with **gifts**. Tipu gives Ruqayya a miniature painting on ivory of a tiger. There is a silent communication between Ruqayya and Tipu. Lala Mian, who is a junior commander, now rises by leaps and bounds under **Hyder's** patronage **until he** becomes a general. Hyder sends a gift to Lala Mian's household every year **at** the time **of Holi**. Lala **Mian dies** fighting **for Hyder at Melukote** in 1771. **Hyder settles large estates on the family and gives** Lala Mian's **command to his son Burhan-ud-din, Ruqayya's brother**. **Tipu calls on Ruqayya's mother to condole the loss of Lala Mian, but he does not see Ruqayya as custom forbids it** (Gidwani, *Tipu* [129]-30).

When Tipu is seventeen years old, Hyder thinks of a marriage between **Tipu and the beautiful daughter of the Nizam of Hyderabad's brother, with the ulterior motive of detaching the Nizam from the English, whose ally the Nizam is. Hyder sends Tipu on a diplomatic mission to the Nizam. Tipu's mission succeeds in breaking up the Anglo-Hyderabad alliance at least temporarily. But Tipu expresses reservations about marrying a girl from such a treacherous family. Upon this, Hyder too has second thoughts. Whenever Hyder identifies a suitable bride, Tipu expresses some objection**



or reservation about her. His mother is of use to him in this, because she can brook no defect whatsoever in the bride. At first, Hyder looks for power and wealth in any prospective bride, but, as his own power and **wealth** burgeon, he looks for only a virtuous and beautiful bride who will give him a number of grandsons (Gidwani, *Tipu* 130-31). Baulked repeatedly in his matchmaking by Tipu and **Fakhr-un-Nissa**, Hyder vows that his next choice will be binding on Tipu. He chooses **Raushana** Begum, daughter of Imam Saheb **Bakshi** of **Arcot** (Gidwani, *Tipu* 130).

That very morning, however, six-year-old Salim, son of Burhan-ud-din and nephew of Ruqayya, prattles to Uncle Tipu, Sultan that his aunt Ruqayya will not marry a man but only a tiger (Gidwani, *Tipu* 132-33).

**Salim** tells Tipu:

‘You know, Uncle, she herself **told me**, after **grandma** and **my father had scolded her sternly for not agreeing to get married, that once—many years ago—a prince met her. So charming was the prince, so handsome, so brave and so strong that a magician became jealous and cast a spell on him. Thereupon the prince turned into a tiger and went to the forests to roam. She is now waiting for him to come back. Every now and then, the wicked magician comes in different disguises and sends her a proposal of marriage. Grandmother and father try to persuade her in vain and then leave her in anger. But she is only waiting for her tiger. She will marry none else.**’ (Gidwani, *Tipu* 133)

Now assured that **Ruqayya** loves him, Tipu asks **Burhan-ud-din** if he would object if their friendship became closer, into a near-relationship. Burhan-ud-din welcomes the idea, though **he** does not **understand Tipu's** words. Tipu goes to his mother's chamber and 'finds Hyder there. Hyder sternly tells Tipu that he will marry now. Tipu agrees, but wants **to** say something. Tipu tells his parents **of his** wish to **marry** Ruqayya and Fakhr-un-Nissa nods approvingly. Hyder has nothing against Ruqayya, but he has given his word **to Raushana** Begum's father and Hyder never breaks his word. **Finally Hyder** finds a compromise—**Tipu is to** marry both **Ruqayya and Raushana Begum. So, in the spring of 1774, Tipu** simultaneously **marries Ruqayya Banu and Raushana Begum** (Gidwani, *Tipu* 133-35). **The union of Tipu and Ruqayya is ecstatic, as** **Gidwani** describes it;

**There was little that Ruqayya and Tipu said to each other on the marriage night. Quietly they lay in their nuptial bed, their thoughts wandering to re-enact the dreams of their past and thence to return to the warmth of the soft-lit bed chamber while the distant music could still be heard. They moved gently and unhurriedly, and together they stitched the night into an unbroken tapestry of love and fulfilment. He knew that the memory of that night would last him beyond eternity. Clearly, he remembered how time had stood still and how their hearts had stopped beating each time their lips met. No, he would never forget her first cry of pain, joy and ecstasy! (Tipu 135)**

‘c:                   , Tipu’s love for Ruqayya never diminishes. Even after her third child, he finds her as young and beautiful as ever and constantly dreams of her in her absence. However, his duties as prince take him away from Ruqayya frequently (Gidwani, *Tipu* 135-36). On the eve of ascending the throne of his deceased father, Tipu ruminates on the sacrifices imposed on his family by Ms royal predicament:

Ever since they were married, life had been almost an endless series of farewells—with one campaign after another, claiming Tipu’s presence. Both father and son had been constantly in action, protecting and strengthening the boundaries of the kingdom. Now that his father was dead and the greedy English eyes would be fixed on Mysore all the more intently, he wondered how much time he would have for Ruqayya and his children! He knew that Ms concern for the kingdom would not allow him to come close to his family. He must almost forsake them, if he was to be king in Ms father’s place. (Gidwani, *Tipu* 136-37)

When Tipu toys with the idea of renouncing kingship and devoting N himself to religion, Purnaiya retells him the stories Ruqayya had told him of Dara Shukoh’s wife Nadira Begum, who refused to cross into Persia with her fleeing husband and preferred to die on her native soil, and of the wife of Jaswant Singh Rathor, who shut the gates of the castle against her husband for retreating from the field of battle, in order to drive home his argument that Tipu cannot break his covenant with, his people and Ms

country (Gidwani, *Tipu* 157-59).

On the night of the 9th of February, 1792, during the siege of Seringapatam by the English, an enemy shall burst while Ruqayya is on her rounds to console the wives of soldiers who have fallen, and she is hurt. She dies while Tipu holds her hand and looks into her eyes (Gidwani, *Tipu* [265]). Gidwani comments eloquently on what Ruqayya meant to Tipu;

The perpetual sparkle in her eyes was now no more.... Now she was gone. He remembered her letters, quite innocent of punctuation, scrawled at a tremendous speed, very' long and packed with entertaining laughter. How she babbled... to while away her husband's cares! Often, she was noisily energetic with unclouded naturalness, throwing her arms round his neck, chattering away, while he listened to her enraptured. Yet, Tipu Sultan knew that she carried in her heart a deep anxiety—a terror that she shared alone with his mother, Fakhr-un-Nissa. But with him she was gay. Love had so planted itself in her heart that none of the storms that assailed her came to the surface when he was with her. When he was sad, she came with a burst of song, free as waves. She would wait for him to smile—and her joy would then shine with a light—the eye-kissing light, the heart-sweetening light. When his mood was dark and his soul in despair, she brought a lamp near his heart to caress his melancholy away. Yes, hers was a great love which lightened

each of Ms burdens. Tipu remembered the definition she had once attempted of love—a passion which balances the entire world against the person loved and finds the world much lighter.

*(Tipu [265]-66)*

Tipu lays kisses like a necklace round **Ruqayya's** throat and sits in shock. Fakhr-un-Nissa comes in sobbing and takes Tipu into her arms to weep together over Ruqayya (Gidwani, *Tipu* 266). Tipu, however, remains in shock for twenty-four hours before he awakens to resume command of his forces (Gidwani, *Tipu* 271).

**Gopalan's Old Tanjore** presents three royal women: the Dowager **Maharani**, the widow of the late Maharaja **Pratapasimha**, and two of the five wives of Maharaja Tuljajee, **Sujana Bai** and **Girja Bai**. The Dowager Maharani was the power behind the throne of her son until she became blind, but even now she can influence Maharaja Tuljajee **powerfully**. **It is she who helps Sujana Bai and Girja Bai to save Tuljajee's adopted son Serfojee, the rightful heir to the throne of Tanjore, from the machinations of the usurper Amar Singh. When Amar Singh sends an assassin to murder Serfojee at night, the blind Dowager Maharani stabs him and dies. Her death incites the people against Amar Singh. Sujana Bai and Girja Bai safeguard Serfojee until Padre Schwartz intercedes with the British and has him placed on the throne.**

**During the early years of the rule of Maharaja Tuljajee of Tanjore, luxury and dissipation, the two constant vices of the Court, were almost**

absent while his mother was an active force in politics. He had just five wives and no mistresses, though his ancestors had had several wives and several mistresses. He was an accomplished ruler, a multilinguist, a generous patron of writers, remarkably tolerant in his religious views. He was a firm and conforming Hindu, though many persons at the Court seriously believed that he would one day become a Christian, because he permitted Padre Schwartz, the Christian missionary, to carry on missionary activities in his realm. He was, above all, a virtuous man (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [34]-35). All this was due to his mother's influence, as Gopalan records: "In the early years of his reign, the tactful window [sic] of Pratap completely overshadowed her young son. She ruled and the Raja simply reigned. Her imperious will and her driving energy were the marvel alike of the Court and of the citizens ..." (*Tanjore* 35-36).

But now, at the age of forty-nine, Maharaja Tuljajee looks at least sixty-five. He has lost much of his natural vivacity and his keen interest in the administration. Senility has set in and he appears world-weary. He develops a stoop and totters on the pavements of the Palace. His peevishness increases with his feebleness. Knowledgeable people in the kingdom attribute all this to the waning influence of Ms mother. The talented Queen has suddenly gone blind and has vanished from her place in life, to be deemed no more' for all practical purposes (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 35-36).

The old lady throws a tantrum at the onset of blindness. She accuses

Maharaja Tuljajee of neglecting her and of rejoicing heartlessly over her sorrow because he now feels free. She imagines that everyone is laughing at her, that her daughters-in-law will mix poison in her food, that there will be none to weep at her death and that her own son will not attend her funeral. All Maharaja Tuljajee's efforts to comfort her and to reassure her of his love are in vain. She merely becomes more violent, shrieks, tears her clothes, beats her head and laughs out a weird, wicked laugh. She calls him a hypocrite and a liar and warns him: "Without me, your throne is a mere seat of dust. I clearly see the rain of your country. There is not one soul that can save it except myself and I am already dead" (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [37]-39).

Upon learning of the aged Queen's affliction, the Minister, Sirkeel Devaji Rao, is in transports of joy and says: "She is no more the King. She is no more the Minister. I am no longer her slave!" However, he runs obsequiously to the King and makes enquiries. Upon sensing his presence, the old Queen reviles him for his ingratitude. She reminds him that he was wallowing in filth and dust when she took him up and put him on the seat of the Minister, after dismissing the good Minister Dubbeer Pundit for his sake. She accuses him of repaying her generosity by laughing at her, speaking ill of her, avoiding her and deriding her. She now regrets having dismissed the good Dubbeer Pandit. In course of time, with his mother being of no assistance to him, Maharaja Tuljajee comes to depend more and more on Devaji Rao, who, exploiting the Raja's growing indifference,

gradually becomes the actual head of the administration (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [37]-40).

Maharaja Tuljajee's first wife, Sujana Bai' Sahiba, was chosen by Ms father for him when he was young. But the other four Queens were wooed and wedded by him. Sujana Bai was named after a great Mahratta Rani of Tanjore of the past. She is now getting old and has ceased to be the celebrated beauty of the Court. She rarely appears before the Court, except on extraordinary occasions, when, as the first Queen of the realm, she is bound to appear. The King is not so fond of her as of the Queens chosen by him, though he knows that she is the most gifted and the most comely of them all (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [50]-51).

The' second Queen, Girja Bai SaMba, was a distant relation of the first Queen and had followed her to Tanjore. Tuljajee fell in love with her, courted her for a year, and, overcoming the objections of his parents, married her. She was tall and stately, with healthy looks and a generous nature, which made her the most admired Queen of the day. Sujana Bai and Girja Bai are cordial between themselves. They are not jealous of the other Queens or dissatisfied with, their lot. Sujana is too tired and long-suffering and Gig a too simple and good to tease or trouble the King (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 51).

In the case of the other three Queens, the King exerted himself and stooped to conquer them. Now he is paying for it. The third Queen, Tara Bai Sahiba, was the daughter of a Mahratta noble. She eloped with the

Prince, for which her father swore vengeance against them both. She is a gay, bright woman, free in her manners and apt to be unmindful of her position. She cares little for the feelings of others. Though she is beautiful, she often presents to her husband a face marred by wicked jealousy (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 51-52).

The fourth Queen, Kamakshi Bai Sahiba, is young and lovely but of a bad and volatile disposition. She causes the greatest mischief in the interior of the Palace and is the centre of most unmentionable quarrels and intrigues. Most of her quarrels are with the fifth and youngest Queen, Padmaja Bai Sahiba, the most beautiful of the Queens. Though free and gay as a song-bird, Padmaja is a tigress when provoked, which is very often.

Tuljajee, in his early years, did not find much amusement in the company of Sujana and Girja, who were too devoted to him to hold his attention. He preferred the company of his three younger Queens, mixing in their quarrels and then pacifying them (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 52),

All the Queens and the women attached to them are purdah to the outside world, never stirring out of the Palace. On very important occasions, the Queens sit on either side of the King in the Durbar Hall, but usually they witness the proceedings only from the balcony above, which has enclosures with, glass windows through which they can see the Durbar Hall below, without themselves being seen (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 52-53).

During a poetry contest held in the Durbar Hall, a drunken British soldier kills Shahajee, Tuljajee's brother (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 57-59). About a

year later, Queen Padmaja dies after delivering a still-born male child. A month later, Queen Kamakshi succumbs to an illness. Queen Tara, in her jealousy, mistakes the King's grief and seclusion for indifference and coldness towards her and swallows poison and dies (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [74]-75).

The wheels of intrigue start spinning upon Shahajee's death. Amar Singh, Tuljajee's half-brother by a sword-wife of his father's, plots to usurp the throne. Tuljajee himself has no son and Shahajee has left behind only a minor son. It is decided that Tuljajee should adopt the minor son and name him Serfojee. Since the boy is only about ten years old, a guardian and Regent has to be appointed during his minority. Tuljajee distrusts Amar Singh, who is ambitious and wicked. So, he requests the Christian, missionary, Padre Schwartz, to be Serfojee's guardian and Regent till he comes of age. Padre Schwartz points out that there are so many factions in the Court that his appointment as Regent will, endanger the life of Serfojee and the kingdom will be swept away in the storm of contention. He advises Tuljajee to appoint his half-brother Regent. He promises to take every care of Serfojee, visiting him daily and being his guardian in every way except in name (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 57-75).

Despite her blindness, the old Queen refuses to be shut out of affairs of state altogether. For about a month every year she feels herself the old imperious woman and becomes difficult to manage (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [80]). She is used to the exercise of power:

When her husband was on the throne, she was the power behind it. When her son ascended it, she moved a step forward and might **almost** have held the sceptre. It is **not** strange that such a woman as the great Ranee, could not, even in her present condition, wean herself entirely from matters **of** administration. (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [80])

In the course of the intrigues following the death of Shahajee, Devaji Rao has been removed from office and is held under virtual house arrest by Amar Singh. The old Queen gloats over this development, because, though it was she who had appointed him Minister, he ungratefully tried to use his cleverness and cunning against her, regarding her **with** indifference and contempt in her blind condition. She curses him, inviting all calamities on his head. Perceiving her attitude, Amar Singh, though he is not a favourite with her, decides to ingratiate himself with her in order to obtain power over the King. Meeting her, he adds fuel to the fire of her wrath against Devaji Rao and, as a result, she is prepared to regard Amar Singh as her own son and help him in his endeavours. She approves of Amar Singh's treatment of Devaji Rao and persuades the King that Devaji Rao's dismissal was inevitable in the circumstances (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [60]-67; [80]-81).

Learning of the King's meeting with Padre Schwartz, Amar Singh hastens to the old Queen and describes in the most lachrymose manner the impending spectre of her grandson and his children becoming Christians, because the King is making Padre Schwartz the Regent. The old Queen's

ire is excited and she vows that she will baulk this move, even if it is to be her last battle. Very cunningly, Amar Singh inveigles her into declaring that he will be the Regent and that her son will not defy her on this point (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 82-83).

The old Queen throws another tantrum. She reviles her son, curses her servants, throws away the food placed before her, fasts the whole day and makes such a commotion that her maids ran to the King and tell **him that** his mother is dying. Tuljajee, who is suffering from a pain in his heart, slowly walks to his mother's room. He finds her lying on the floor, the food scattered ail over the room and the bedding thrown pell-mell. She refuses to be comforted by him and charges him. with having forsaken her and his religion. She wants to **kill** herself. She asks him **to** turn Padre Schwartz out of the kingdom. **The King** assures her that he will never become a Christian and will not make Padre Schwartz the Regent. She asks him to make Amar Singh the Regent The King is surprised to hear such a wish from. her. She tells him not to distrust Amar Singh and assures him that his half-brother is faithful to him and to the throne and also loves **Serfojee**. Maharaja Tuljajee agrees to this (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 83-86).

**Maharaja** Tuljajee dies three days after adopting Serfojee, who ascends the **throne**, with Amar Singh as Regent, About a year later, Amar Singh writes **letters** to Fort St. George, challenging the validity of the adoption on religious grounds. The Court of Directors sends a Committee of Enquiry, which is duped by well-bribed Pandits into dethroning Serfojee and

enthroning Amar Singh (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [96]-105). Somehow Serfojee comes to fear that he is to be confined to a room henceforth and that his uncle Amar Singh, who is angry with him, will beat him. The widowed Queens Sujana and Gija, who have always loved Serfojee and, since his adoption, have treated him as if they were each his own natural mother, reassure him that none of these things will happen. He does not understand why he was asked to get off the throne. Gija tells him that he is too young to sit on the throne now. But neither of the ladies can answer him when he asks why he was originally placed on the throne (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [109]-110).

The day after the dethronement, King Amar Singh's Minister, Shiva Rao comes to take Serfojee to the King. Serfojee does not want to go. Shiva Rao threatens to take him by force to the King. Serfojee runs to his mothers for protection, because he fears that he will be killed. Shiva Rao confronts Sujana. She admits that she is helpless, but says that, the previous night, she dreamt that Shiva Rao put Serfojee in a room, beat him, whipped him and starved him to death. Shiva laughs at the notion of imprisoning and beating Serfojee. Sujana appeals to Shiva Rao's goodness and pleads that Serfojee be left with them for a few more days. Disregarding the pleas and the tears of the widowed Queens, Shiva Rao drags Serfojee away. The Queens beg him to take them also along and imprison and whip them along with him. Shiva Rao assures them that he will bring Serfojee back and then disappears with the boy (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 111-13).

The old Queen, who has become quiet and inactive after the adoption of Serfojee, is suddenly roused to action by a visit to her by Sujana and **Gijjaat** midnight. Sujana shakes the old Queen out of her stupor. She identifies them **with** her hands. Sujana **tells** her that **the King has confined** Serfojee in a room and is trying to kill him. She is confused, because she has not heard of the dethronement of Serfojee. Sujana explains the developments to her and seeks her help in locating the place where Serfojee is confined. The old Queen curses Amar Singh and asks the ladies to lead her forth (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [125J-28]).

. The old Queen takes a big key from a bunch of keys in an aimirah. She steps out of her apartment into the corridor and marches on until they reach a fenced courtyard. Coming to the massive door of a room, she asks the ladies to knock at the door. At the third knock, they hear a muffled sound as of scratching from the other side of the door. The old Queen asks the ladies to open the door with the key. The old Queen calls out to Serfojee. When there is no reply, she asks Sujana to call out to him. She does so and sees a figure retreating in fear. Serfojee, who thought a 'murderer had come to kill him, recognises his mother's voice and comes forward. Sujana lifts up Serfojee. The three ladies retrace their steps (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 128-30). ■

Vasudeva Rao, the Manager of the Palace, informs King Amar Singh that Serfojee has escaped. He believes that the old Maharani opened his dungeon and took him out and that the boy is now with her in her

apartment. Amar Singh moans, “even after her cremation the old hag will walk out of her ashes and fill this Palace with her infernal presence. She seems to live on ambrosia. Otherwise, how does she manage to be immortal?”\* (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 134-36).

Vasudeva Rao reports that his men have been trying in vain since early morning to open the door of the old Maharani. Amar Singh orders Shiva Rao to smash the door to pieces and kill everyone inside. Half an hour later, Shiva Rao returns to report that the door cannot be opened without creating a commotion, because it is made of strong iron as the walls also are. He advises leaving the matter as it is at present. Amar Singh will not hear of it. He goes there in person and orders the door to be forced open. The commotion brings all the inmates of the Palace there. At last Amar Singh orders the men to stop. The old Queen has vanquished King Amar Singh (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 137-38).

King Amar Singh is vexed because he knows that the old Queen’s apartment is a veritable fortress and contains enough provision for months. But Shiva Rao counsels utilising the occasion to their advantage by sending for Padre Schwartz and showing him what is happening so as to nail dead the British Resident’s charge that Serfojee is being kept in a dungeon. Accordingly, Padre Schwartz and the Resident are brought to the place and told how the rebellious women refuse to let the boy out because they fear that he **will** be handed over to the Christians (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 138-40).

The three ladies keep a constant vigil over the terrified Serfojee. At



midnight, a workman starts cutting a hole in the massive iron door with a drilling machine. A plate is taken out of the door. A tall man peeps in and sees the old Queen sitting on her bed, with the two ladies nodding by her side, beside the bed on which Serfojee is sleeping. Moving to the bed, he binds Serfojee's mouth, with, a kerchief and carries him to the door. Serfojee awakes, kicks vainly to escape and wants to cry out, but cannot. He feels himself thrust into a hole and received by men outside. Just then the tall man inside the apartment shrieks and falls, stabbed by the old Queen with a dagger. Sujana and Girja awake and see that the stabbed man is Shiva Rao, the King's Minister. They also see two men, one of them the Manager of the Palace, peering through the hole in the door. Discovering that Serfojee is missing, the ladies wail to the old Queen. When they catch hold of the motionless old Queen, she collapses in their arms. She is dead (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 142-45).

The death of the old Queen has a dramatic effect:

The tragic death of the old Maharani and the events leading to it stirred the hearts of the people to pity and admiration. Though a very gifted woman, she had in her palmy days hardly been popular, being of a very teasing and whimsical disposition; but the people of Tanjore were now inclined to forgive her many faults and be generous to her when she was dead, although, they were hardly just to her while she was alive. Her death evoked a spontaneous ebullition of sorrow from them as her funeral

procession passed through the streets. Their sorrow over her death soon took the form of wrath against the King and his Minister, as was obvious from the fact that as the procession passed angry voices were heard from the crowd, voices shouting death to the King and his Minister.... (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [146])

The whole story of the treatment of Serfojee has leaked out and the entire town is talking about it. The death of the old Queen has broken the silence on the subject. Padre Schwartz and the Resident, Mr. Ram, see that Amar Singh has deceived them. They hasten to the Palace and ask to see Serfojee. They make it very clear that they have heard of what happened in the Palace the previous night. Shiva Rao pretends that the story of Ms being wounded in the affair is not true. The King tries to escape by saying that they have to join the funeral procession. Both the Resident and Padre Schwartz, advise him against it, since the people are crying out for the life of the King and his Minister (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [146]-48).

Overhearing Shiva Rao bribing the Kallar Chieftain Pulikkutti, the chieftain of the band of Kallars who have adopted him as their guru, Tukaram, the old friend of Shahajee, goes to the Palace, enters the room where Serfojee and Padre Schwartz are sleeping and, playing on Pulikkutti's superstitious devotion to Mm, orders him away and saves Serfojee and Padre Schwartz (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [154]-165).

After being saved by Tukaram, Padre Schwartz keeps the room bolted from inside till the British Resident arrives in the morning. He tells Mr. Ram

of the happenings of the night. They at once remove Serfojee to a residence away from the Palace without waiting for the permission of the King (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 165). Queen Sujana and Queen Girja also live with him in the house, which is always guarded by soldiers under the orders of the British Resident. Padre Schwartz, visits him daily. Serfojee masters the English language within a year (Gopalan, *Tanjore* [184]).

Padre Schwartz, with the help of Tukaram, discovers foolproof scriptural and legal authority to prove that Serfojee's adoption by Maharaja Tuljajee was quite valid in Hindu Law. He writes to the Governor-General in this regard (Gopalan, *Tanjore* 183). Learning of this, King Amar Singh resorts to some wiles so that the people and the two widowed Queens become suspicious. Padre Schwartz, who has also heard rumours of the King's intentions, advises the British Resident to send Serfojee and his mothers to Madras. This is done. While they are all in Madras, they learn that the adoption of Serfojee has been declared valid. Serfojee and his mothers are overjoyed and grateful to Padre Schwartz. Amar Singh is dethroned and Serfojee is raised to the throne of Tanjore (Gopalan, *Tanjore* **187-88**).

Modak's *Single Is the Wheel* presents two royal women, Waranasi Bai Saheb and Venu Bai Saheb. The ruler of Pune, Shrimant, is terrified of his first wife Waranasi Bai. Venu Bai is a soft and dutiful wife. The shadow of Shrimant's dead mother hovers over him and the stoy.

On the morning of the planned attack on the English by the Maratha

forces, the wives of Shrimant, the Ruler of the Maratha kingdom of Pune, the Bai Sahebs, in great fear, go by covered bullock-carts drawn by caparisoned bullocks and take shelter in the temple at the top of Parvati Hill, three miles southwest of Pune. - Shrimant also joins them. When they see General Moro Diksheets fall prey to the English batteries at Khadki and General Gokhale have his horse shot from under him, Shrimant's eyes fill with tears and he gasps in distress. His most beloved wife consoles him saying that God still lives. When the Chamberlain, Vinayak Shastri, counsels Shrimant to leave the battle in the hands of General Gokhale and go to Fort Raigadh until the war is over, Shrimant refuses to do so because Ms troublesome wife Waranasi is there (Modak, *Wheel* 28-30; 33).

When Vinayak Shastri rouses the conscience of Shrimant and opens Ms eyes to his sins and Ms responsibility, the Ruler decides to win the battle for Pune and recapture Bombay and Ahmednagar. It **will** be a long war and he is determined to accompany the army. So he entrusts the women of his family to the care of Vinayak Shastri, who accepts the charge. An hour later, Shrimant sends a chest of jewels and coins to Vinayak Shastri, who disposes of the treasure in safe hiding places (Modak, *Wheel* 37-38).

After concealing the treasure, Vinayak Shastri recalls the burden of guilt that Shrimant carries:

He [Vinayak Shastri] had been little more than a boy on the day when, sitting on the broad wall of the Rampart, he had heard the screams of the young ruler, Narayan, from within the palace.

Two soldiers dashed out, scaled the wall, and dropped to the road outside. He watched them meet a confidante of Narayan's aunt, mother of Shrimant, the present Ruler. **Vinayak Shastri** never disclosed what he had seen; he left that for the **gossip** of the elders. But he remembered it, and remembering, understood the burden Shrimant carried. **(Modak, Wheel 38)**

When the battle is lost, Vinayak Shastri sends word to the royal ladies that he will go **to** them when he can (Modak, *Wheel A3*). **But** he is not able to keep his word, because he is put in prison by the victorious English (Modak, *Wheel 60*). In May 1818, General **Gokhale** dies fighting the British. Shrimant surrenders and obtains favourable terms to go into exile at a place to be chosen by the English (Modak, *Wheel 71-72*). Vinayak Shastri is released from prison (Modak, *Wheel 73*). **The next day the ladies of Shrimant receive word from Elphinstone that the place of exile will be Brahmavarta, a village nine hundred miles northeast, on the banks of the Ganges, ten miles from Kanpur (Modak, Wheel 78). Venu Bai Saheb goes on her last visit to the temple on Parvati Hill, accompanied by Vinayak Shastri (Modak, Wheel 85-87). The priest tells her:**

**“Our trials are great Bai Saheb, but other women have gone through greater trials than these. Sita followed her royal husband in fourteen years of exile, wandering on foot through the forests. She was harassed by much evil, but in it all God guarded her. You and your family will be carried safely through all you have**

before you.” (Modak, *Wheel* 87)

Sitting down for some time on the hill top, Venu Bai Saheb tells Vinayak Shastri that Chintamani Shastri was at the bottom of his arrest and that he dislikes and hates him. She also says that the English physician, Dr. Coats, has been good to her and to so many people. But Vinayak Shastri says that Dr. Coats is a spy, going from house to house to sow jealousy and distrust among them (Modak, *Wheel* 87-88).

At Brahmavarta, Shrimant and his Court are confined to a six-mile area. At first they live in tents, awaiting the construction of buildings. The British Resident persuades Shrimant to build and furnish a western style house for himself. Shrimant and the Bai Sahebs dwell in this three-storeyed mansion. When western furniture arrives for the houses, Vinayak Shastri and his wife Sarja Bai refuse it as an attempt to make them despise their own and to weaken their love of their country. Saraswati Bai, Shrimant’s youngest wife, takes her cue from them and refuses the western furniture. Venu Bai Saheb learns of their refusal of western furniture and falls ill out of shame because she has already accepted it (Modak, *Wheel* 105-12).

One day Shrimant confesses to Vinayak Shastri that his mother’s sin in murdering the lawful Ruler in order to make her son the Ruler had followed him and eaten him up. He had no heir. He became lecherous because he had no son. He went from wife to wife for a son. They had daughters and the daughters died. He went from woman to woman for pleasure until his body became a house of disease. His senior wife Waranasi boldly told him

that his disease killed the children and four of his wives. She herself stopped allowing him near her years ago. He thinks that Waranasi has no sex in her and is not a woman. He complains that he told her to go to the Himalayas and become an ascetic but, instead, she sold his elephants and pocketed the money. She is very beautiful, but wastes her beauty on training horses. Shrimant has heard that a priestly family in Pune with the same surname as his had a son born recently. He wants to adopt this boy. But he wants the boy to be far from the foreign ways and far away from the women. So he wants Vinayak Shastri to keep this boy with him and bring him up like his son. He asks Vinayak Shastri to go to Pune and bring this boy to Brahmavarta. He wants Vinayak Shastri's wife Sarja Bai to nurture his adopted, heir. Vinayak Shastri consents to all this (Modak, *Wheel* 136-40).

Saga Bai goes to the mansion to take leave of Shrimant's wives. Venu Bai Saheb has become emaciated in the past seven years at Brahmavarta. She says that she will die soon. Saraswati Bai, Shrimant's youngest wife, is completely absorbed in prayer and devotion and prays without an image in the shrine in her room. Waranasi Bai, the senior but least loved wife of Shrimant, is not in the mansion, but visits Saija Bai that night. She is as beautiful and slender as ever and still possesses a queen's demeanour (Modak, *Wheel* 142-44). She says:

“I was never for a woman's life.... In my childhood my mother died. My father did not take another wife nor send me to my

relatives. He kept me with him until **he** married me **to the** Ruler. I had little femininity in me in spite of my appearance.... Now I ride my **mare** to monasteries and nunneries—and to aid villages. **I've** had wells dug, roads mended, trees planted:—**rest-houses—I do what I can....**” (Modak, *Wheel 144*)

She **tells** Vinayak Shastri and **Saija Bai**:

“ . . . . **Who knows the** fixture! **We are useless people—it is your children who will rebuild Pune and drive the foreigners into the black sea—not those of us who use foreign frippery. The Ruler has the place filled with stranded people come here for succour—dancers, musicians, philosophers, poets, wrestlers. He keeps himself busy with his excesses. The Resident encourages i t . . . . The Resident doesn't understand you, honoured Shastri. He thinks you are rebellious. Are we not all rebellious?**” (Modak, *Wheel 145*)

She says that though they do not meet often, they need him there to jog their memories awake. Later she persuades the Resident to offer Vinayak Shastri a monthly pension of five hundred rupees provided he returns to live at Brahmavarta (Modak, *Wheel 145-47*).

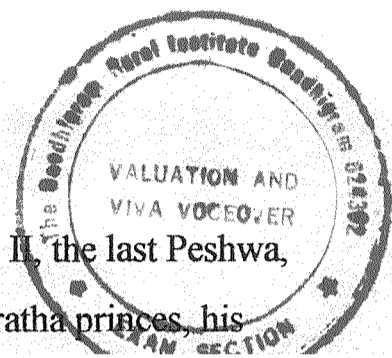
At Pune, after making enquiries, Vinayak Shastri calls on the Bhutt family whose son Shrimant wishes to adopt. They hesitate because they have only one son. So Vinayak Shastri asks them to take the child to Brahmavarta and live comfortably there for the rest of their days (Modak,

*Wheel* 156-57).

The **Bhatts** accept the offer and their two-year-old son, named Nana, is placed in Vinayak Shastri's arms (Modak, *Wheel* 157). When they return to Brahmavarta, the **Bhatt** family comes with them and are established in the **house** next to Vinayak Shastri's. By agreement the father places his son formally and ceremoniously on the lap of **Waranasi** Bai, who places the child in **Sarja Bai's** care and training. Shrimant often comes at night to fondle the child. He believes that, at last, God has heard his lamentation, for he has a son now (Modak, *Wheel* 162).

Dismissed from the service of Shrimant **by the** East India Company, Vinayak Shastri leaves Brahmavarta and goes with his family **to Prayag, where they stay in a hostelry which Waranasi Bai had built there for pilgrims from Pune. Sarja Bai exclaims that they never heard that Waranasi Bai's good works extended so far. Saija Bai comments: "She [Waranasi Bai] never spoke of her good deeds. She truly followed the scriptures—doing good without thought of reward"** (Modak, *Wheel* 222-25).

Malgonkar's novel *The Devil's Wind* has several royal women: two wives of Nana Saheb, who die after consummating their marriage; his wife **Kashi**, who survives because he never consummates their marriage, and saves his life by becoming the mistress of the Prime Minister of Nepal; Nana Saheb's mistresses **Champa and Azijan**; Nana Saheb's cohabitant in Nepal, **Eliza**; **Mani**, the future Rani of Jhansi; **Queen Hazrat Mahal** of Oudh; and, **Zeenat Mahal**, the last and favourite wife of Emperor Bahadur Shah.



Sex is one of the principal obsessions of Bajirao II, the last Peshwa, and one of the main causes of his downfall. The Maratha princes, his feudatories, hate him more than they hate the British because, besides humiliating them and seizing their estates on the flimsiest of pretexts, he behaves as if their womenfolk belong to him. He often holds the master of some prominent family to ransom and demands that he send his wife or sister or daughter to his Palace to participate in his orgies. Those who refuse are singled out for reprisals (Malgonkar, *Wind* 14). Bajirao has a fetish for observing beautiful women undress and titivate themselves. He has fitted out a mirror hall as a dressing room and stocked it with a selection of rich silk and gold work saris and jars of attars and lotions and perfumed pastes. He politely invites his women guests to go into this room and choose whatever garments they fancy and come out dressed in them. As they are doing so, he watches them through holes in the mirrors. As a result of all this, his powerful hereditary chieftains are often up in arms against him. In 1802, when one of his principal feudatories, the Holcar, rebels, Bajirao runs into the open arms of the British, who patiently indulge his excesses for sixteen years and then dethrone him in 1818 and confine him to a six-square mile territory called Bithoor, twelve miles from Kanpur (Malgonkar, *Wind* 14-19).

Bajirao brings up his goddaughter Mani as a future wife for his adopted son Nana Saheb. She is a pupil with him at the *paga*, or riding school. She fences, rides and swims with him and the children of the royal

retainers. None of the other children think of her as a girl (Malgonkar, *Wind* 22). But the ghost of Narayan, the fifth Peshwa, whom Bajirao's parents caused to be murdered, often appears to Bajirao at night and curses that his house will be burned down by his protectors and that his line will end with his successor. Bajirao screams that Nana will have numerous sons and that he has already chosen the girl Nana will marry. But the ghost laughs and says, "He can marry more women even than you have. But if ever a marriage is consummated, the wife shall die—not a single woman can live to bear Ms child!" (Malgonkar, *Wind* 24-25).

Nana's entire life is warped because of the curse of the ghost: the first two women Nana marries do not long survive the marriage and the third survives only because he has never been a husband to her, since he will only be killing her. Bajirao's trusted priests offer a pat solution to nullify the effect of the curse, on the lines of the story of Patali-putra, who was first married to a *patali*, or vine, and then to a girl, who bore him children, who founded a great dynasty. So the priests suggest marrying Nana to a *patali* sapling and then sacrificing the sapling in place of the wife. Bajirao swallows the idea, not realising that the ban is not so much against marriage itself as upon marital relations and that it applies to as many wives as Nana marries (Malgonkar, *Wind* 25-26).

A few days before his seventeenth birthday, Nana is duly married to a *patali* plant in a tub with the fullest Vedic ritual. That night, Nana's seminal fluid is sprinkled on the plant ritualistically. Nana tends the plant with all

care. For a month the plant flourishes and the buds on it blossom. But, forty-nine days from the wedding day, the plant dies. The priests declare joyfully that their plan has succeeded and that the plant has been accepted in sacrifice in place of the wife. Bajirao, however, thinks otherwise. Abandoning his long-cherished plan of marrying Nana to Mani, Bajirao selects a healthy young woman from one of the courtesan establishments of Lucknow, named Champa, and presents her to him as his concubine. Nana has always believed that Champa was the best thing that could have happened to him (Malgonkar, *Wind* 26-27).

However, Nana has never forgiven Bajirao for ruling that Mani was not to be his wife, because

She was like someone in a fable, a symbol more than an actual person; harsh, unbending, audacious, and yet with a tenderness that was wholly feminine; cold and deliberate in spite of her fiery temper, and impishly impulsive too; a supple, athletic, hard-grained creature of the wind and the sun with the boldly sensuous configuration of a stone goddess, she was yet all woman who could make your heart turn to water with a mere look.

(Malgonkar, *Wind* 27)

As children, Nana and Mani grow up together, though she is only the daughter of a retainer named Moporant Tambe. She does everything with a gusto and style so that she seems to excel everyone else, particularly Nana. Bajirao adores her and so she is brought up like a princess. Quite naturally,

Nana grows up hating her, though he is careful not to show his jealousy openly, as far as possible. Once, when Mani wishes to ride on an elephant with him, Nana insults her by saying that only princes and not retainers' children are to ride on elephants. Mani scowls and declares that one day she will have ten elephants for each one of his. Later, Mani becomes the Rani of Jhansi and certainly has more elephants than Nana (Malgonkar, *Wind* 27-28).

Bajirao's decision regarding Mani disappoints Nana terribly:

the moment Bajirao revealed that she [Mani] was not to be my wife I experienced a sudden sense of loss as though something to which I had been grafted was being severed, leaving a raw wound that would remain with me all my life. I had never doubted that if Mani had become my wife, my life would have been altogether different—richer, rewarding, exciting. She might not have made me a quiet, properly subservient Hindu wife, but she and I would have made a matched, formidable team, cancelling out the pluses and minuses in our personalities and rounding them off.

(Malgonkar, *Wind* 28)

Nana says that Bajirao should not have done it to him or to Mani:

She whose life he [Mani] sought to lengthen did not live long, but burned up quickly, like a roaring flame. The husband Bajirao found for her was old and feeble, for all that he was a ruling prince and fabulously wealthy. Bajirao did not know that he also

suffered from a queer perversity which made him masquerade as a woman and even pretend that he suffered from the pangs of menstruation. Mani, hobbled by the bonds of marriage to this obnoxious creature, made him a devoted and dutiful wife and—by what sexual artistry or magic it is difficult to say—even induced in him the spark of maleness necessary to have marital relations with her so that she bore him a son. This son died in infancy and the enfeebled father died soon afterwards, but not before adopting another's child as his successor. Again Mani fell into her new role with gusto, the role of the diligent foster mother and protector and regent of her husband's principality. Then the Devil's Wind stirred and she reached out to embrace it and became the greatest rebel of us all. (Malgonkar, *Wind* 28-29)

With the exit of Mani from his life, Nana is left with the concubine Champa. Though named after a delicately scented, velvety flower, she is “as much a creature of the earth as a rock lizard, with a skin the colour of ancient copper and the texture of grained silk.” She is “a mature, fully developed woman, with a body toughened by the demands of professional dancing and professional sex.” When Champa first enters his room, Nana yells at her to get out and never come again. She goes away, but returns as soon as he is in bed. He hurls abuse at her, slaps her and shoves her out. But the moment he puts out the light she crawls back. Then, as though to work off his rage, he rips off her clothes and tears into her body. She

absorbs his clumsy assaults and awakens his passion against his will (Malgonkar, *Wind* 29). Nana's first experience of sex with her is obscenely passionate:

Legs coiling like snakes held me fast; nipples slippery as sucked betel nuts brushed tantalizingly against my skin. Resentful in the knowledge that I was' being prepared as a. victim for her lust and yet once again in the grip of desire, I was conscious of the sense of revulsion brought on by the smell of her skin that was like sour wine, by the mouth which had been so shockingly depraved in its search breaking out into a repetitive half-breath, half-word, English obscenity just seconds before the final shudders. (Malgonkar, *Wind* 29-30)

Within a few days, Nana realises that he cannot match Champa's range of passion and surrenders to her and is rewarded:

With Champa I discovered sex as though I were the first man on earth and she the last woman. Soon I began to shiver with desire for the very things that had made my flesh shrink, the controlled pressure of her fingers, the heady, warm smells of her body, the feline purring breaking into its incantation of obscenity as though to mark the attainment **of some goal**, and the **convulsive** shudders as though something within her had burst. (Malgonkar, *Wind* 30)

Soon Nana comes to regard Champa as not merely a woman who has sold her life for a backward place in his. If there is no love in their life,

there is no deceit in it either. She perfectly understands what it is to be a mistress. She works at her role with zest and makes a complete success of it. She is “devoted but not demanding, tender but not mawkish.” She never presumes or takes things for granted. She is there whenever he needs her and yet she never intrudes in his life away from the bed chamber. When Nana tells her that Bajirao has found a wife for him, she is more excited than Nana himself (Malgonkar, *Wind* 30).

Whether Nana unwittingly wants to punish his bride for not being Mani or he expects her to be another sexual athlete like Champa, the fact is that the bridal night is a nightmare. The frightened, cowering girl stares at him as though he is a wild animal come to devour her. While he anticipates sheer ecstasy, the consummation of the marriage turns out to be a trial of perseverance. The bride is a terrified child, ignorant and unaroused. Her skin is cold and covered with goose pimples and her shrinking away from him insults his manhood. As he lies exhausted but unfulfilled, she sobs into the pillow. The flow of blood from the rupture does not cease for, a long time. By the morning she has a burning fever. Within two days she dies. For days after that, Nana does not want to touch another woman. Then he goes back to Champa (Malgonkar, *Wind* 30-3,1).

Within a few weeks, Bajirao sends out emissaries to find another wife for Nana, holding out an offer of a lakh of rupees to the father of the bride. Champa comments that the Peshwa should have waited for people to forget the curse. Since the curse is so widely known no father offers his daughter,

though the Gangetic plain is “the stamping ground of indigent brahmins” (Malgonkar, *Wind* 31). But the Peshwa does not have to wait for long:

The greed, of brahmins is as proverbial as their poverty, and the smell of the hundred thousand, lying unclaimed and rotting, must have made their nostrils twitch till they hurt. Barely two months had passed before the emissaries returned, complete with a family carried in three separate palanquins: father, mother, and marriageable daughter—or, indeed, a daughter long past the marriageable age, for she was already seventeen and could never have found a husband because her father was so destitute. Bajirao approved and the marriage was quickly got over, and the parents stayed on only long enough to collect the reward and then disappeared without a trace as though anxious to shake off pursuit (Malgonkar, *Wind* 31)

At the time of Nana’s marriage to Giiija, the priests decreed that she must perform a pilgrimage to Ujjain on the full moon of the month of Magh before the marriage is consummated. For four months they share a bed without consummating the marriage. Nana can see that Girja is consumed by physical desire. On the eve of her departure for Ujjain, Nana tells Girja about the curse. She laughs at the superstitious belief. That night she topples Nana’s resolution and they consummate their marriage. The next morning, Girja sets out on her pilgrimage. On her way back from Ujjain, she dies of cholera. Nana’s only consolation is that she has not died, from

injuries inflicted by him (Malgonkar, *Wind* 32-33).

Nana does not want to get married ever again. Bajirao is worried about the succession. Nana says that he can adopt a son. Nana fears that the East India Company will make difficulties. Nana refuses to marry, because his wives all die. Bajirao hopes that one of them will give him a son before dying. Nana says that he has become impotent and cannot have sex with a wife, though Champa is different, because she is a mistress. Bajirao suggests a Chinese concubine, since the Chinese are best equipped for arousing jaded appetites. Nana protests that he is quite happy with Champa. Bajirao advises Nana to get rid of Champa and get someone younger (Malgonkar, *Wind* 33-35).

In 1846, when Nana is twenty-two years old, Champa gives birth to a girl. Bajirao is overjoyed and names her Gangamala, “the Garland of the Ganges.” He orders an elaborate celebration and invites all the Kanpur officials and their wives. He gives away gold snuffboxes to the men and, gold attar cases to the women with the occasion of the naming ceremony of Nana’s daughter inscribed on them. The ulterior motive of the gifts is to negate any report of Nana’s impotence by the numerous spies of the East India Company (Malgonkar, *Wind* 37).

Two months after the naming ceremony of Gangamala, in December 1846, Nana sees her wet nurse, Azijan, chosen by the senior wife of Bajirao. One day, while lying beside the sleeping Champa, in the bungalow to which she moved for her confinement, Nana looks through the window

and watches Azijan suckling Gangamala. He is charmed by her bare shoulders and her bare breasts of the classical mango shape and the red nipples pointed upwards. Champa observes this and asks if she is not beautiful. It is quite some time before they realise that, while she has been talking about Gangamala, he has been talking about Azijan. Champa screams obscenities at Azijan. A week later, finding Champa asleep, Nana goes to the adjoining room and asks for water. Azijan serves him water so provocatively that he throws half the water over her face and body. Azijan turns and goes away, pouting and smiling, walking with a peculiar animal grace. Nana returns to Champa's room and compares her body and Azijan's. Nana is impatient for Champa to return to the Palace. She says that her body has not returned to normal after childbirth. Champa calls for water. Azijan brings it, her sari still wet over her body. Champa catches Azijan by the hair, smells her breasts and, beating her on the face with her slipper, curses her for sucking her baby with her body unwashed and her nipples smelling of somebody's tobacco. She hits Azijan on the face a few more times with the slipper and sends her away to wash her body (Malgonkar, *Wind* [38]-40). Hatred turns Champa's face ugly, as Nana reports:

so contorted it was with hatred. She was hating herself and trying to lash out at something that had happened to her—the widening of the lips, the fold under the chin, the pimply dark circles around the nipples and the mottling of the flesh over the thighs. The

triumph was Azijan's; she stood straight as a soldier, not defiant but somehow contemptuous, intuitively aware that she was making her mistress suffer by being just what she was and what Champa would never again be. She did not utter a sound or even flinch against the blows, but the pitiless, scornful eyes were causing far more hurt than the limp, velvet slipper. (Malgonkar, *Wind* 40)

Two days later, Nana finds that Azijan has been replaced by another wet nurse. Champa has made strenuous efforts to make herself desirable. She tells Nana that he must not come to the bungalow again, because she is returning to the Palace on the new-moon day. When he complains that it is nearly a month hence and that he has suffered too long a celibacy already, she shows him a youth paste, which is guaranteed to make the body youthful again after a month's massage. She has got it from a *hakeem* who brought it from Damascus, made for Queen Zeenat Mahal. She lays down a few conditions for her return: he has to wait in total darkness and she will not say a word to him all night. Nana agrees to all these conditions and leaves the bungalow (Malgonkar, *Wind* 40-42).

On the appointed night, as he lies naked and trembling in anticipation, she comes to Ms bed, as Nana describes:

she came and lay down beside me. And it was just as she had said: the miracle had happened. She was what she said she had been at seventeen, like a whip. The suppleness of her limbs, the

. texture of her skin, the responses of her body, even the sounds of gasps and moans were different, as was the rhythm of the final ecstatic shudders. The nose-filling smell of the youth paste was the only thing recognizable; that and the one English word repeated like a stutter that I had learnt to accept as a sort of punctuation mark, signifying culmination.

I paid her extravagant compliments; told her that she had never been like this even on the night when she had first come to me, six years earlier. I told her that she was like a tigress hungry for love and indulged myself to the utmost in the obscenities of love talk. When I begged her to let me light a candle so that I could gloat over her restored figure, she silenced my protests with a kiss that left me exhausted. Smothered in the soft, velvet night, we made love as though two animals of the jungle, male and female, had come together by a process of natural selection and were discovering each other. I dropped off to sleep like a tired child, pillowing my head against her fragrant shoulder.... (Malgonkar, *Wind* 42-43)

Waking up late in the morning, Nana stares at Champa in shock and a cry escapes from him, because Champa is exactly as she was after Gangamala's birth: "a matronly, comfortably stout, square, pleasant-faced woman in her mid-thirties; not the slim young woman whom I had compared to a tigress, a tigress who could yet constrict her body like a snake

and whose tongue was like the tip of a bullwhip.” It clear to him that it was not Champa who was in bed with him through the night. He is impatient to know who it was. Champa says that it was his new concubine, who will be with him every day from then onwards. He protests that .he wants only Champa. She says that she is too old to be a concubine. He says he loves her. She says that she loves him too and that that is why she has found him someone nearer to his age, who will give him all he wants. Then she reveals that, throughout the previous night, she was in the same room, listening to all his amorous prattling, because she did not trust his “hungry tigress” not to let him. light a lamp so that he could “gloat over her odd-shaped tits.” Champa confesses that she wants him to have just what he is pining for, so that she can retire. She says that she will, retire to the bungalow now, because she is no longer just a concubine, but a mother (Malgonkar, *Wind* 43-44).

Champa presents Azijan. to Nana as his new concubine. She has taught Azijan to talk courteously, as Champa herself used to do in the beginning of her days in the Palace, even, letting her into the secret of the most intimate signals used by her and Nana (Malgonkar, *Wind* 44).

Champa says:

“A whole month I’ve been doing little else. Taught her to scrub her body and had my maids rub pearl paste into her to get her clean and soft. She was wild and vulgar and she stinks like dog shit and she is used to being felled only by grooms and sweepers.

I don't know how she hasn't caught some disease, but she hasn't. I have had her examined. I have made her fit to be a king's bedmate." (Malgonkar, *Wind* 45)

Azijan soon becomes as devoted to Nana as Champa herself. She is not very faithful, but Nana connives at her occasional infidelity, because she cannot help it (Malgonkar, *Wind* 45). Nana is grateful to the gods for the gift of Champa:

She was indeed indispensable, and no one could have held a place of greater respect in my tightly circumscribed world. Not my wife, she yet was the partner of my joys and sorrows, a nurse during my illnesses, a jester during my ill humors; she ordered the meals and supervised the washing of the windows and the swabbing of the floors and saw to it that my guests were well looked after. No longer my mistress, she remained the mistress of my household, the woman who held the keys of the safes and storehouses and worried about wastage. My brothers addressed her as *Tai*, or elder sister, and brought their problems to her, and neither Tantya nor my secretary, Azim, ever sat down in her presence or could bring himself to tell the latest camp joke.

Even though, to me, her special attraction lay in her womanly ways—the little coy, disarming gestures of the hands and the subtle play of the eyebrows, the twisting of the nose and the pouting of the mouth and the fluttering of the eyelids which are so

essentially Indian—she betrayed none of the weaknesses inherent in femininity, such as tears and tantrums and sulks. It was almost as though, having withdrawn from a life that was dominated by sex, she had rejected femininity itself, or at least shucked off its special armour plating and the weapons of offence; or as though she had changed her sex and inwardly become a man, someone equipped with, greater powers of understanding and forbearance and an altogether tougher mental fibre.... (Malgonkar, *Wind* 45-46)

As soon as Bajirao discovers that Champa is pregnant, he knows that Nana's impotence is pretended and he sends agents to find another bride for him. Unable to find any bride in India, the agents move south and find a bride in the Deccan, in a village called Sangli, at least a thousand miles from Bithoor. Her name is Kashi and she is reported to be ten years old. Nana first sees her at the wedding ceremony, "a sickly, black-haired creature with large, petrified eyes and skin mottled as though feathers had been plucked from it" She reminds him of "a crow brought to a snake house for a python's meal." Bajirao declares that Kashi will be brought up as a princess and proceeds to engage tutors and companions for her proper upbringing (Malgonkar, *Wind* 46-47). But Nana never consummates the marriage:

Kashi and I never slept in the same bed. She lived in a distant wing of the wada, which I seldom visited, so I saw her but occasionally. All the same, during ceremonies and festivals, we

had to sit side by side as man and wife and offer prayers together, for, in families such as mine, conventions are inviolable. A wife is a wife, a husband a husband, and the two are tied together in one bundle that only death could untie. It was almost a master-and-slave relationship. God knows I did little enough to live up to my obligations as the master; all the same, Kashi made a perfect slave, industrious, diligent, and, above all, loyal. Her unswerving loyalty makes me squirm with guilt,—unless that was her way of punishing me, some intuitive, feminine form of revenge.

(Malgonkar, *Wind* 47)

In 1846, Lord Dalhousie annexes Oudh under his Doctrine of Lapse. In 1849, the rumour spreads that, upon the death of the old Emperor Bahadur Shah, the Mogul monarchy is to be abolished and the Red Fort vacated. The rumours set off counterplotting, with Zeenat Mahal, Bahadur Shah's favourite queen, at the centre of it. As a Mogul queen, she enjoys the blind reverence of millions of the Mogul's subjects. They take up her cause. Zeenat's motive, however, is only private vengeance for the British refusal to recognise her own son Jawan Bakht as heir-apparent to the Mogul throne. Her instrument is Ahmadullah Shah, the Moulvi of Fyzabad, the firebrand patriot who has become familiar as the Mad Mullah (Malgonkar, *Wind* 64-67).

Nana, analyses the secret of Zeenat's power:

A harem, maid, singled out at random by some transmuted.

functionary to provide a night's warmth to the frail dope-dazed Emperor, had sprung a surprise on him by giving him his very last, unhoped for son. That was in 1839, eighteen years earlier, but Zeenat still held the old King tethered by the same nose ring, pandering, by her simulated pregnancies, to his illusions of vitality regained. Even after an implausible number of false alarms and miscarriages, Bahadur Shah, now in his eighties, still clung to the hope of fathering another son by this woman of miraculous fecundity. He drooled at the sight of her and whimpered like a scolded child when she denied him her favours. And Zeenat, for her part, played him like a fish brought within reach of the gaff, tormenting him and making him give in to her most outrageous whims. (Malgonkar, *Wind* 67)

Zeenat prevails upon Emperor Bahadur Shah to represent to the Company's Resident, Sir Theophilus Metcalfe, that his oldest surviving son, Fakiraddin, is not eligible to become his heir because he has been circumcised and that only Jawan Bakht, among his sons, is uncircumcised and so eligible to be his heir. When Metcalfe turns down, the request, Zeenat swears vengeance against the company. This tantrum in' the royal harem soon blossoms into a struggle to throw out the British traders and resuscitate the empire of the Moguls. The Mad Mullah takes over from there and guides Zeenat's hand. He goes about preaching death and destruction in the name of the Emperor. Wherever he goes, people become

aware of the omens they have not noticed before—the Ganges flowing red, a rainbow ring around the moon,, the collapse of the big church tower in Bombay, rumours of beef bones ground into the flour supplied by the Company and of sugar being whitened with pig's blood, and, messengers bearing *chapatis*. The Mad Mullah sets the date for the revolt, the twenty-third of June 1857—the day of the centenary of the battle of Plassey, when Robert Clive's victory began the Company's rule. When Oudh is liquidated, the Mad Mullah openly calls upon his listeners to kill the *firanghis* (Malgonkar, *Wind* 67-68).

While the British are patiently waiting for the Mogul Emperor to die, there are others who are in a hurry to bring things to a head before he dies. So, early in 1856, Prince Fakiruddin, whom Dalhousie has chosen as heir apparent, dies of poisoning. The usual Mogul formula is for a kitchen maid to put a few grains of dhatura root in the food and, as the victim lies writhing in agony, two agents to rush in and administer additional poisons instead of palliatives. The Emperor and Zeenat again press the claims of Jawan Bakht, but Sir Metcalfe rejects them. Before the Governor-General's decision, based on Metcalfe's recommendation, is announced, the revolt begins and, when it ends, the question of a Mogul successor has ceased to be relevant (Malgonkar, *Wind* 69-70).

The Mad Mullah sends emissaries to the princes of India bearing a letter with the Queen's seal, inviting the erstwhile vassals of the Moguls to Deli to offer their condolences personally to the Emperor for the death of

the heir-apparent Fakiruddin, though it is six months since he died. It is at this meeting that the broad strategy of the revolt is decided upon. Zeenat announces that her personal seal, the white lotus, will be the symbol of the revolt, to be used as a code in communications. The *chapatis* are to be passed from hand to hand, from village to village. Each village that receives one is to bake four and take them to four villages. *Chapatis* have been chosen because they are usually distributed to get rid of some pestilence such as smallpox. The Mad Mullah says that the hat men are a pestilence worse than smallpox. It is pointed out that there are not more than one hundred thousand white men in the whole of India (Malgonkar, *Wind* 81-82).

Zeenat and the Mad Mullah are certain that the people will follow their erstwhile rulers blindly. They do not perceive that the princes are sheep in British-made pens. They request Nana Saheb to visit the Maratha princes and persuade them to join the revolt, while they will write to the Muslims, the Rajputs and the Kings, of Persia, Kabul and Russia. Nana writes to Zeenat that he will visit as many of the Maratha princes as possible and send messengers **to** those he cannot visit (Malgonkar, *Wind* 84-85).

Nana falls in love with Eliza Wheeler, the older daughter of General Wheeler and his native wife Janaki, but he keeps it a secret. One day, during a visit to Bithoor, Eliza begs Nana to save Michael Palmer, her boyfriend, who has gone out to commit suicide. Nana saves Palmer's life by deliberately losing to him at cards. Later Eliza returns and kisses Nana

as if in gratitude. Palmer disappears after a sex scandal (Malgonkar, *Wind* 88-93).

At Diwali in 1856, Nana contemplates upon his wife Kashi:

Now, married nearly ten years and still, for all I knew or cared, a virgin, this mousy creature had blossomed into an implausibly beautiful woman. I also knew that, as a result of the course of training Bajirao had laid down and with which I had not interfered, she could talk with authority on any subject that a cultivated person might be interested in and could ride and shoot and play the sitar and sing and, as I knew from personal observation, could make herself look seductive or unapproachable as the occasion demanded.... (Malgonkar, *Wind* 94)

Kashi's sheer physical beauty gives added validity to the family curse. It is a challenge, testing out how long he can keep himself from making a sacrificial offering of his wife. Kashi is a problem for him to which he has no solution (Malgonkar, *Wind* 94).

One day, Champa suggests to Nana that he should marry Eliza Wheeler, who seems to go for him. She informs him that Janaki favours the match, that Eliza's earlier flame, Palmer, has married a rich old widow and that Eliza has told her parents that she will not marry a white man. As for the curse, Champa assures him that, physically, Eliza is too strong for a curse and that, in any case, being a Christian, Eliza will not be superstitious. Nana is favourably inclined, but wants to talk to Eliza first about the curse

(Malgonkar, *Wind* 96-99).

Late in the night, Champa leads Nana to a terrace from where they see Azijan sleeping naked with Lieutenant Delafosse, a young guest brought over by the Wheelers and put up in a bachelor room. Champa says that Azijan must be flogged and driven out. Nana favours marrying her to a groom. The next day, Azijan, when confronted, spurns the idea of marriage. Instead, she asks for capital to open a dancing school in Kanpur. Nana gives her ten thousand rupees without Champa's knowledge and sends her away (Malgonkar, *Wind* 99-101).

In March 1857, Nana receives the permission he sought to go on a pilgrimage. However it is too late, because things have come into the open already and the British are alert. Zeenat sends a messenger asking Nana not to go on a long journey, but stay at his post. The Mad Mullah feels that the storm may break earlier than expected. They ask Nana to visit Lucknow and see how things are shaping up there. Nana goes to Lucknow, which is now a city without a soul. Wajid Ali, King of Oudh, having been bundled off to Calcutta, Queen Hazrat Mahal and a large number of elderly ladies from the royal family, including seven former queens, live in Lucknow by selling their jewellery to buy their daily needs (Malgonkar, *Wind* [113]-14).

Hazrat Mahal hails from Fyzabad and is therefore a protege of the Mad Mullah. It is widely believed that she rose to be the favourite queen, of King Wajid Ali solely by virtue of the Mad Mullah's blessings or machinations. Nana carries to her a message from the Mad Mullah saying that she should

remain in Lucknow and not go to the side of her deposed husband. When the rebellion breaks out, Queen Hazrat takes an active part in the fighting (Malgonkar, *Wind* 114). Nana comments on Queen Hazrat Mahal thus:

Hazrat Mahal was a creature bred and shaped for dalliance; perfumed, voluptuous, coquettish, her lips seductively sucking an imaginary grape, and the quick, signalling eyes and the dancing eyebrows of a courtesan lining up customers. She was, when I first saw her, like some juicy hothouse fruit which should have been eaten yesterday. Her skin had the pale gold pallor that can be acquired only in a harem, where the light of the sun never penetrates; and under that skin, it was difficult to imagine some sort of a bone structure—only layers of the softest down.

(Malgonkar, *Wind* 115-16)

Yet, before leaving Lucknow, Nana concludes that Hazrat is “a woman who would be cool in a crisis, who would not be swayed from her objective, no matter what happened” (Malgonkar, *Wind* 116).

The Englishmen in Kanpur go into an Entrenchment. They are persuaded to come out and prepare to leave for Allahabad by boat. But, at the Satichaura ghat, impulsive shooting by sepoy from outside results in a massacre of the whites. Several white women and children guarded in a house called Bibigar in Kanpur are murdered by a neurotic woman. After this the rebellion fizzles out in Kanpur and, as Havelock’s avenging column approaches, everyone flees. Nana too prepares to flee. He asks Champa

and Gangamala to take some gold and go into hiding. Champa picks up Nana's slippers and says that those are all she wants. As Nana bundles some ornaments, precious stones and gold coins, Champa brings Jayanti, the sword of Bajirao I, and insists on his taking it with him. Nana embraces Gangamala, says a prayer and sends her off to bed. Then he tells Champa that he is going to pretend to take the *jal-samadhi*, that is, drown himself publicly in a ritualistic act, accompanied by only the members of his family to perform the last rites over his body. Champa understands and leaves, so as to make the parting easy for him. When Nana reaches the ghat, his wife Kashi is waiting for him to assist in taking the *jal-samadhi*. Kashi performs the ritual perfectly and convincingly. As a small crowd watches, Nana, Kashi, his two brothers and his cousin and some others leave by a boat. The three boatmen are sent away. After some more ceremonies, Nana leaves the boat and swims back ashore (Malgonkar, *Wind* [214J-20]).

As Nana wades ashore about half a mile above the Bithoor ghat, the candles in the boat are doused and a piercing ululation arises, telling the watchers that Nana has taken the *jal-samadhi*. Nana goes to the house of Nizam Ali in Akbarpur, as already planned with his family. As he nears the house, he hears a shrill scream and some English words. Entering the house he sees a naked and bleeding woman being nailed to the wooden floor board through her palms by an ugly woman. Nana cuts the ugly woman in two with his sword. The naked woman squirms and then her eyes close. It is Eliza Wheeler. An old toothless woman and a beardless boy peep in. The

woman yells but the boy recognises Nana, who chases them away (Malgonkar, *Wind* 220-24).

Nana teams from Eliza that she was fished out of the water after the Satichaura massacre of the whites. Nizam AH took her away. He forcibly converted her to Islam and married her, but she managed to kill him. Nizam Ali's wife was torturing her to death when Nana killed her. Eliza suffered much during the last three weeks. Nizam Ali raped her everyday, while Ms' wife and another woman held Eliza down. Eliza tells Nana that she is pregnant and that she does not want to go back to her English friends because they will hold her only in contempt or pity for what has happened to her. Nana leaves the choice to her (Malgonkar, *Wind* [224]-25).

As already arranged, Azim and Nana's manservant Waghū bring a boat near Nizam Ali's house. They go to the pre-arranged hideout in the fort of Chaurasi. KasM takes charge of Eliza and nurses her and slowly brings her back to life (Malgonkar, *Wind* 228-29). Nana feels immensely grateful to KasM:

She was married to me, but she was no more than a piece of furniture in the wada—something to be put on display on public occasions. My adversity had, as it were, infused life into her. By some right I never remember conceding, she had become the mistress of my household, such as it was now. To be sure, I was grateful to her for taking over the running of my house in exile, but I must confess I never expressed my gratitude to her. To me

she was like a serpent in the closet, the superlatively beautiful curse that I had to guard against taking to bed. It has never been easy for me to think of Kashi as a woman. When she ceased being a curse she became a goddess, and you cannot really show kindness to a goddess.... (Malgonkar, *Wind* 229)

Nana sends Azim. to fetch Champa and Gangamala from Bithoor. While waiting for them, he learns of what happened to Azijan.. She was declared an active rebel and Neill ordered her to be hanged. But Havelock intervened and offered to spare her life if she helped them in their inquiries into Nana's *jal-samadhi*. At this, Azijan hurled brothel obscenities at her captors. So she was hanged—the first woman to be hanged from the Kanpur banyans (Malgonkar, *Wind* 229).

As Nana waits impatiently for Gangamala and Champa, some villagers inform him that Bithoor was plundered by the English and his house burned. Azim returns after a few days. He is wearing the headdress of mourning, a plain white turban. He cannot say for sure if Champa and Gangamala were among some women burnt along with Nana's house. Nana goes to his prayer room and kneels down (Malgonkar, *Wind* 230). Nana recalls Champa's complete devotion to him:

Champa, my mistress and the mistress of my house, though not married to me was yet the woman who was closest to me. Once she had told me that even though she was not my wife she considered herself to be entitled to perform sati if I happened to

die before her. In all seriousness she had implored me to leave instructions to my descendants **that** she should **not** be prevented from doing so on the grounds that she was not married **to** me. . . . In the event, she had performed her act of self-immolation while I was **still** alive. (Malgonkar, *Wind* 230-31)

Nana also feels acutely the loss **of his daughter Gangamala, the** gift of the Ganges, as though she has been claimed back by the Ganges. She may have perished **in the tykhana**, or underground chamber of the Palace, or, as several people have told him, she may have been abducted **by** the Gujars.' For some time, Nana toys with the idea of suicide. Then he thinks of surrender, being quite sure **that** the first white soldiers who come upon him will put an **end to** his troubles. However, he decides to die in the robes of the **Peshwa and wearing the famous** Jayaoti (Malgonkar, *Wind* 231).

**Gradually, thousands of sepoys gather round Nana and they set up camp in a fort. Nana even sends out troops near Bithoor. However, they score no** victory. **For a time, the British believe the ruse of the** *jal-samadhi*. **The British enthusiasm for revenge is tempered by caution. Tantya Topi rejoins Nana with half of Scindia's army. However, in** September, news arrives of the fall of Delhi, along with that of the massacre of the Emperor's sons by Hodson and Metcalfe. **Then the British fan out for merciless , revenge again** (Malgonkar, *Wind* 232-36).

**The white man's greed gives Nana a brief respite from pursuit. The British learn of the treasure in Nana's well and spend a fortnight dredging it**

up. Nana adopts “mountain rat” tactics, that is, independent bands of soldiers harassing the British and, if necessary, vanishing into neighbouring Nepal. Queen Hazrat, now holed up in the fort of Baunda, offers to house the women of Nana’s camp as long as possible and then take them into Nepal with her. The night before her departure for Baunda, Kashi begs Nana’s permission to adopt the child of Eliza, who wishes to have nothing to do with it. Nana is not happy because it is a child of rape. But Kashi points out that it is the only favour she has ever asked of him and that she can not bear a child of her own. Nana consents (Malgonkar, *Wind* 238-40).

Nana is a hunted man with a price on his head, with his picture posted on trees and street corners all over Oudh. As Nana is taking the women to Baunda, one day, they encounter a patrol commanded by Michael Palmer. Nana prepares for the worst. But Palmer leaves his sepoy behind, comes up to Nana, offers him brandy from his flask, and tells him of the disposition of British troops and of the dangers, empties his purse into Nana’s hands and rides away (Malgonkar, *Wind* 240-51).

Mani, now the widowed Rani of Jhansi, joins forces with Tantya Topi’s band and marches on Gwalior to confront Scindia with an ultimatum to join the cause. Scindia promptly flees into British hands. Mani and Tantya Topi hold an investiture in Gwalior on 3 June 1858 to proclaim that the Maratha Confederacy has been reborn, with Nana’s nephew Raosaheb installed to act as Peshwa in Nana Saheb’s absence. The British attack Gwalior and Mani dies fighting them (Malgonkar, *Wind* 253).

With most of the leaders of the cause done away with by the British, Nana decides to seek asylum in Nepal, ruled by its Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur, who has exiled his own king and queen and murdered most of the noblemen of the realm. Balarao conveys the news of the takeover of India by the Crown from the Company. Queen Hazrat issues a counter proclamation warning her erstwhile subjects not to be deceived by Queen Victoria's proclamation. British columns attack both Hazrat and Nana in their hideouts. So both groups set out for Nepal (Malgonkar, *Wind* 253-57).

Nana's party is received by Colonel Balbhadra Singh in Nepal as if well expected. An order is served on Nana that, while Hazrat's party and the women in his party are welcome, he, his brothers and their followers must leave Nepal, since the Jung Bahadur is an ally of the British. Nana writes a stinging reply, but adds a postscript thanking Jung Bahadur for agreeing to receive his wife and the other women. In the evening, Kashi is invited to dinner with the Senior Maharani. Balbhadra relaxes after Kashi leaves for the dinner and tells Nana that he is deputed to settle everything, since Jung Bahadur must go on pretending ignorance of Nana's presence. Balbhadra spells out the conditions under which Nana can stay in Nepal, the most important of them being that he and Kashi must not be together. Now it is clear to Nana that the lecherous Jung Bahadur is bargaining for Kashi. He rages at Balbhadra, who runs away. An hour later, Kashi returns. She tells Nana that Jung Bahadur asked her to be his mistress and she agreed in order to save Nana's life. Nana rages at her, but she parries all his insults

(Malgonkar, *Wind* [258J-62). Finally, she says that, by this arrangement, she too will get what she wants:

“I want to be a woman, not merely a repressed freak. I want to live, to become a mother, to experience physical love, violent, abandoned. I want to be in the glitter of a great king’s court, not in a hermitage. I’m past twenty and what else was there for me but the prospect of lifelong abstinence, to die before I ever learned to live? And, above all, I did not want to be the cause of my husband’s death. Don’t you see, my lord, that I am doing this as much for you as for myself?...” (Malgonkar, *Wind* 262-63)

Overnight, Nana perceives that this arrangement is a neat solution of his marital tangle. He sends for Balbhadra (Malgonkar, *Wind* 263).

Balbhadra comes and assures that Nana and his followers will be quite safe in the Daang sector of the Terai jungles, dressed as sadhus of the Mouni sect, who never speak to anyone, but have women disciples. Balbhadra says that Eliza cannot go to Kathmandu and so will be hidden elsewhere. Balbhadra also agrees to arrange to send Nana’s married sister Kusurna to Gwalior to her husband’s house, Balbhadra obnoxiously demands a thousand rupees a day for Nana’s stay in Nepal and then says that Jung Bahadur is interested in diamonds, which are not available in Nepal, particularly the Naulakha necklace. He says that, if Nana parts with the Naulakha, he and his party can stay for three months in Nepal. They break off the talks for the day. Eliza comes and tells him that she wants to

remain with Nana and he is happy. Balbhadra returns the next day and they agree to exchange the Naulakha necklace for thirteen months of stay in Nepal (Malgonkar, *Wind* 263-69);

Nana camps in Butwal in the Terais. The first monsoon fever kills about fifty of his men and his brother Balarao. Jung Bahadur sends Balarao's ashes to be immersed at Benares in the Ganges as the ashes of Nana Saheb and he writes of it to the British. Eliza bears Nana a daughter, whom they name Mani, after the Rani of Jhansi (Malgonkar, *Wind* 270-73).

Kashi is installed in Kathmandu as Jung Bahadur's principal concubine. She blossoms there and scandalises the Court by taking other lovers. On the fourth and last day of Diwali she visits Nana to circulate a tray of butter-oil lamps before him as she used to do in Bithoor, as if to prove her right to wear the red dot on her forehead. On such annual visits, she brings greetings and secret messages from Jung Bahadur. The Court-painter, Gaganrai, one of her lovers, makes her immortal by making her the model for his pictures of Hindu goddesses. The Gurkha soldiers adopt her as the sex image of their bawdy songs. She comes to wield great influence in the Nepalese Court. She works hard to preserve the little dot on her forehead. In the final reckoning, Nana feels that Kashi has proved a far more valuable asset than either the Naulakha necklace or the Shiromani emerald (Malgonkar, *Wind* 276-78).

When Nana has been in Nepal for fourteen years, the political climate of the country changes. Ex-King Rajendra and Badri Narsing, Jung

Bahadur's disgraced brother, are plotting together to oust Jung Bahadur. One day, Kashi arrives unexpectedly and warns Nana that Nepal is no longer safe for him and so he must leave at once. Eliza and Mani will go to Kathmandu with Kashi and will be sent to him when he asks for them. Kashi cries for bringing bad news. Nana wipes away her tears and kisses her chastely as a brother kisses a sister. He then gives her the fabulous Mastani's eardrops. Kashi receives them in a corner of her sari, like a beggar receiving a piece of stale bread. Kashi is astounded. Nana says that she is beautiful enough to wear them. The remark pleases Kashi much more than the gift. She blushes. She bends down and touches his feet in gratitude. Nana offers her his blessings, as a father might bless his daughter (Malgonkar, 0M[279]-84).

Nana decides to return, alone to India dressed as a pilgrim. He gives enough jewels to Eliza to enable her to live comfortably and marry off Mani. He distributes the rest of his possessions among his servants. Eliza and Mani leave for Kathmandu (Malgonkar, *Wind* 284-85).

Nana visits Scindia and then goes to Malwan, where he is to board a ship for Mecca. When he enters his cabin, he finds Eliza and Mani waiting for him, dressed as Muslim, women. Azim joins them in Mecca and buys for Nana an appointment as the agent of the Mecca Shareef to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. So they all move to Constantinople. Scindia has arranged for a local counting house to give Nana credit for the elephant load of gold he entrusted to him in 1856. So, Nana, Eliza and Mani want for

nothing (Malgonkar, *Wind* [298]-306).

Mohan Jha, in “Malgonkar’s Female Characters: A Study,” says:

Champa, Nana Saheb’s first concubine, is more than a mistress to him; she is as much his bedmate as his adviser, and remains loyal to him till the end of her life. Azijan, his second concubine, is not faithful to Nana Saheb, but she is a patriot, and plays a big role in fanning the flames of revolt at Kanpur. Subsequently, as and when the revolt is suppressed, she is captured by the British forces and hanged. (17)

## Chapter 5

### Summing-Up

Royalty has played a very important role in the history of India, which is universally known as the land of rajas and ranis. So, quite naturally, many Indian writers, particularly novelists, have been drawn to royalty for themes. Many Indian English novels portray real kings and queens from Indian history and recreate past ages. There are also many Indian English novels which tell the imaginary stories of imaginary kings and queens and kingdoms, but with great fidelity to the lived life of real royal personages in royal India.

In all the Indian English novels depicting past ages of Indian history, the focus is on the royal protagonists and their rule. Accordingly, critics have invariably concentrated on these protagonists and their public activities. Hardly any critic has paid attention to the royal women in these novels in spite of the fact that the women played important roles in the lives, of the protagonists and influenced their conduct significantly. Hence this study of the royal women portrayed in Indian English fiction.

In the case of the monarchs of yesteryears, history provides at least some information about their reign and about their personality. But, in the case of the royal women associated with them, hardly any information is available. So the novelists attempting to portray royal women from the past have had to exercise keen historical imagination to recreate past ages and

portray the royal women of those ages with verisimilitude and in ■ consonance with the personality of the royal protagonists and the royal milieu,

**Raina's *Ambapali*** tells the story of the **famed** dancer of **Vaishali**, whose charms mainly caused the destruction of her **country**. The arch enemy of Vaishali, **Ajat Shatra** of **Magadh**, learning of her beauty, visits her in disguise and, captivated by her beauty, marries her in the ***gandharva*** fashion. She conceives and then discovers that he is the hated enemy, the **Magadh** Monster. She rejects him. He vows to destroy Vaishali and claim her as his prize. He vanquishes Vaishali, but discovers that she has renounced the world and become a devotee of Buddha. Besides, his son by Ambapali, **Vimal Kund**, **has, at a tender age, become a Buddhist *bikkhu***.

**Ayyar's novel *The Legions Thunder Past*** shows how **Queen Kalavani** of **Asvaka**, prompted by her love for her infant son and the evil counsel of **Karala**, betrays her country after the death, in battle, of her husband **Asvajit**. She ultimately becomes the mistress of **Alexander** with the Greek name of **Kleophis**.

**Ayyar's *Baladitya*** tells the story of two great Hindu kings of **Aryavarta**, **Narasimha Baladitya** of the **Gupta** dynasty and his friend and vassal **Yasodharman**. Challenging the alien **Hun** invaders of the **Gupta** Empire, **Baladitya** ascends his rightful throne at **Pataliputra**. But he offends his friend **Yasodharman** by marrying a commoner named **Saraswati**, instead of a **kshatriya** princess. He further offends the **Sanatan Hindu** **Yasodharman**

by converting to the Buddhist faith. As a result, their original aim of ridding Bharatavarsha of the alien Huns remains a dream. The wives of the two friends, Empress Saraswati and Queen Charumati, and Yasodharman's mother, Maharani Mahamaya, gradually effect a rapprochement between the estranged friends. As a result, twenty eight years later, a confederation of Hindu princes is mobilised under the leadership of Yasodharman and the alien Huns are driven out of Aryavarta.

Dasgupta's *Razia* tells the story of Sultan Razia, the only woman to sit on the throne of Delhi in her own right, her grooming for the throne, her being thwarted by the powerful Amirs, her ultimate triumph and her subsequent fall as a result of the intrigues of the Amirs.

Jafa's *Nurjahan* tells the story of Mehrunnisa, the widow who married Emperor Jehangir and became the virtual ruler of Hindustan, her early love affair with Prince Salim, the plotted murder of her husband Sher Afghan, her widowhood, her marriage to Emperor Jehangir, and, the stratagems by which she captured power, denying it to Prince Khurram. as long as she could. *Nurjahan* is virtually a harem story and portrays a large number of royal women.

Murari's *Taj* tells the story of two royal women, Mehrunissa and Arjumand. Mehrunissa, the widow, becomes the last wife of Emperor Jahangir and the virtual ruler of Hindustan. She schemes and intrigues so as to keep Prince Shah Jahan as far away from the Mughal throne as possible so that she can enthrone her good-for-nothing son-in-law Shahriya. But

Shah Jahan's wife Arjumand, who is her niece, counsels her husband correctly and he wins the battle of intrigues and ascends the throne. With Arjumand's death, Shah Jahan's world comes crashing down and he spends the major part of his remaining life in building a memorial for her.. Because' he rejected her advice not to kill his brothers, Shah Jahan sees his son Aurangzeb murdering his brothers. Aurangzeb also imprisons his own father and ascends the throne.

Khosla's novel *The Last Mughal* tells the story of two emperors of Hindustan enslaved by women. Emperor Akbar the Second, under the evil influence of a trio of royal women, his favourite queen, his mother and his paternal aunt, tries to prevent his eldest son, Prince Abu Zafar from succeeding him as Emperor. Abu Zafar, as Emperor Bahadur Shah, under the influence of his last and favourite queen, Zeenat Mahal, tries to prevent the rightful Crown Prince from succeeding him to the Mughal throne.

Gidwani's novel *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* tells the story of the rise to power ofHyder Ali Khan of Mysore and his son Tipu Sultan's spirited nationalist challenge to the tentacles of British hegemony in India. Tipu's mother Fakhr-un-Nissa is a great influence on his mind: and character, which ultimately influences the destiny of Mysore. Tipu's wife Ruqayy a Banu also influences his character and conduct significantly.

Gopalan's *Old Tanjore* presents the intrigues at the Court of the Mahratta kingdom of Tanjore. Maharaja Tuljajee's lawfully adopted son Serfojee is checkmated by the usurper Amar Singh, who tries to murder

Mm. But the Dowager **Maharani**, Tuljajee's mother, and Tuljajee's wives Sujana. and Girja save Serfojee with the help of the Christian missionary Padre Schwartz. Subsequently, Padre Schwartz, with the help of Tukaram Rao, the friend of Tuljajee, succeeds in removing the usurper Amar Singh from the throne and enthroning Serfojee.

Modak's *Single Is the Wheel* tells the story of the fall of the last Maratha kingdom of Pune to the British under its ruler Shrimant. Two of his queens play significant roles in the story. His dead mother's role is significant, because his tragedy is traced to her treachery in placing him on the throne after murdering the lawful successor to the throne of the Peshwa.

Malgonkar's novel *The Devil's Wind* tells **the-** story of the Indian uprising of 1857 from the Indian point of view, particularly from the point of view of Nana Saheb, the central figure in the Kanpur theatre of the uprising, who was maliciously maligned by British imperialists as the butcher of Kanpur. His first concubine Champa and his wife Kashi, with whom he never consummated his marriage because of a curse, play significant roles in his life and influence his conduct significantly. His second concubine Azijan plays a minor role in his **life**, but an important role in the uprising. Queen Zeenat Mahal, Queen Hazrat Mahal and the Rani of Jhansi also play significant roles.

The authors of these novels have exercised keen and commendable historical imagination in portraying the royal women involved in these stories, though hardly any information or evidence is available in historical

sources about these royal women. The novelists deserve special appreciation for portraying these royal women with verisimilitude and in consonance with historical records, the historical milieu and the personality of the protagonists of the novels.

It would be a rewarding exercise if some scholar were to undertake a comparative study of the royal women in Indian English historical novels and the royal women in imaginary tales of royalty in Indian English fiction like Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb* and Gita Mehta's *Raj*.

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