

Reimagining Her-Story: Feminist Resistance And Historical Subversion In Jaishree Misra's *Rani*

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Historical fiction has increasingly emerged as an important literary space for recovering voices that have remained marginalised within official historical narratives. Jaishree Misra's *Rani* (2007) exemplifies this trend by offering a nuanced reinterpretation of the life of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, moving beyond the conventional nationalist portrayal of the queen as merely a fearless warrior. This study explores how Misra reconstructs the historical image of Lakshmibai through a feminist and postcolonial lens, foregrounding her emotional complexity, political consciousness, and individual agency. The paper examines the novel by employing the theoretical perspectives of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, together with the postcolonial insights of Homi K. Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study investigates the ways in which the novel interrogates patriarchal historiography and colonial representations that have traditionally silenced or simplified women's contributions to history. Misra's blending of documented historical events with imaginative narration enables the recovery of a female subjectivity that has long remained absent from imperial and nationalist archives. The analysis demonstrates that *Rani* transforms Lakshmibai from a symbolic national heroine into a fully realised historical individual whose resistance is shaped by both personal experience and political commitment. By dissolving rigid binaries such as history and fiction, public and private, and masculinity and femininity, the novel expands the possibilities of historical representation. The study concludes that *Rani* is not merely a retelling of a familiar historical episode but a feminist intervention that reclaims women's narrative authority and redefines historical memory through the recovery of suppressed voices, thereby making a significant contribution to contemporary feminist historiography and postcolonial literary studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historical Fiction and Feminist Rewriting

Historical fiction has long served as a dynamic literary form that bridges documented history and imaginative storytelling, enabling writers to revisit the past while questioning the assumptions embedded within official historical records. Unlike conventional historiography, which often privileges political events, military achievements, and the actions of dominant figures, historical fiction provides space for recovering overlooked experiences and alternative perspectives. As Hayden White (1973) observes, historical narratives are not neutral reproductions of the past but interpretative constructions shaped by ideological and cultural assumptions. Consequently, contemporary historical fiction has increasingly become a medium through which authors challenge established versions of history and foreground voices that have remained absent from traditional historical discourse.

One of the most significant developments within this genre is the emergence of feminist historical fiction, which seeks to recover women's experiences from the margins of history. Feminist scholars have consistently argued that conventional historiography has largely been written from patriarchal perspectives, resulting in the exclusion or simplification of women's contributions to political, social, and cultural life. By revisiting historical events through female protagonists, feminist writers interrogate the gendered nature of historical knowledge and reveal the complex roles women have played in shaping societies. Rather than presenting women as passive witnesses to history, these narratives portray them as active participants whose choices, emotions, and acts of resistance influence historical transformation.

In recent decades, feminist rewriting has become an important critical strategy in postcolonial literature, particularly in societies where colonial domination and patriarchal traditions have jointly shaped historical memory. Such narratives reconstruct the past by integrating private experiences with public events, thereby dissolving the rigid boundaries between history and fiction. Through this approach, historical fiction not only questions dominant historical narratives but also restores narrative agency to women whose voices have been silenced or overlooked. This reorientation of history from a feminist perspective provides the conceptual foundation for examining Jaishree Misra's *Rani*, which reimagines Rani Lakshmibai not merely as a nationalist icon but as a complex historical subject whose identity is shaped by courage, vulnerability, political consciousness, and resistance.

1.2 Jaishree Misra as a Contemporary Novelist

Jaishree Misra occupies a distinctive position in contemporary Indian English literature through her sensitive exploration of identity, gender, memory, family relationships, and cultural transformation. Emerging as a prominent novelist in the early twenty-first century, Misra has established herself as a storyteller who combines emotional depth with social realism, often portraying women negotiating complex personal and societal challenges. Her fiction reflects the lived experiences of women situated within changing cultural landscapes, where tradition and modernity frequently intersect and conflict. Rather than presenting women as passive recipients of social norms, Misra consistently portrays them as individuals capable of questioning authority, exercising agency, and redefining their identities.

Misra's literary career began with *Ancient Promises* (2000), a novel that received widespread appreciation for its portrayal of a woman's struggle against patriarchal expectations within the institution of marriage. This was followed by several acclaimed works, including *Accidents Like Love and Marriage* (2001), *Afterwards* (2004), *Secrets and Lies* (2009), and *A Love Story for My Sister* (2015). Across these novels, she explores themes such as love, displacement, social conventions, familial relationships, and women's emotional resilience. Her narratives are characterised by accessible language, psychological realism, and carefully developed female protagonists whose personal journeys mirror broader social and cultural concerns.

Among Misra's works, *Rani* (2007) marks a significant departure from her predominantly contemporary settings by entering the realm of historical fiction. In this novel, she reconstructs the life of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi through a perspective that privileges the queen's humanity, emotional conflicts, and political consciousness rather than merely celebrating her military heroism. By blending historical evidence with imaginative narration, Misra challenges conventional representations of one of India's most iconic historical figures and offers a more nuanced understanding of female leadership and resistance. This approach situates *Rani* within the broader tradition of feminist historical fiction, where literary imagination becomes a means of recovering women's voices that have been overshadowed by patriarchal and colonial histories. Consequently, Jaishree Misra's contribution to Indian English literature lies not only in her compelling storytelling but also in her commitment to reinterpreting history through the lens of women's experiences, thereby enriching contemporary discussions on gender, identity, and historical memory.

1.3 Rani Lakshmibai in Historical Memory

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi remains one of the most enduring figures in the history of India's anti-colonial resistance. Her leadership

during the Revolt of 1857 transformed her into a powerful symbol of courage, patriotism, and sacrifice, securing her a prominent place in both historical records and the collective memory of the nation. While historical documents acknowledge her military leadership against the British East India Company, successive generations have elevated her image beyond that of a regional queen, portraying her as an embodiment of national pride and resistance against colonial domination. Consequently, Lakshmibai has become a cultural icon whose legacy extends far beyond the historical events in which she participated.

Colonial accounts, however, often represented Lakshmibai through ideological lenses that questioned her legitimacy and political authority. British narratives frequently depicted her either as a rebellious ruler who threatened imperial order or as an exceptional woman whose military capabilities were viewed as anomalies within a patriarchal framework. Such portrayals tended to minimise her political intelligence and administrative competence, reducing her significance to the circumstances of rebellion rather than recognising her as an independent political leader. These representations reflected broader colonial strategies of interpreting resistance through imperial assumptions about gender, race, and governance.

In contrast, Indian nationalist discourse reclaimed Lakshmibai as the heroic "Rani of Jhansi," celebrating her fearless resistance and unwavering commitment to the nation. Literary works, patriotic poetry, biographies, films, television serials, and popular cultural narratives have consistently reinforced this heroic image, presenting her as an ideal of selfless patriotism and martial bravery. Although these representations restored her position within the national imagination, they often privileged her public achievements while overlooking the emotional, personal, and gendered dimensions of her life. The complexity of her experiences as a woman, widow, mother, and ruler frequently

remained subordinate to her symbolic role as a nationalist heroine.

It is within this context that Jaishree Misra's *Rani* assumes particular significance. Rather than reproducing familiar heroic narratives, the novel humanises Lakshmibai by exploring her inner conflicts, political dilemmas, emotional resilience, and evolving sense of self. Through this literary reconstruction, Misra transforms a celebrated historical icon into a multidimensional individual, thereby inviting readers to reconsider how history remembers women and how historical fiction can recover voices that conventional historiography has only partially preserved.

1.4 Statement of the Problem and Research Gap

Rani Lakshmibai has occupied a central place in Indian historical consciousness for more than a century, inspiring extensive scholarly discussions, biographies, literary works, and visual representations. Most of these studies have celebrated her as a fearless warrior and a symbol of nationalist resistance during the Revolt of 1857. While such interpretations have successfully established her importance in the history of India's freedom struggle, they have also contributed to the construction of a largely heroic and monolithic image that often overlooks the complexities of her lived experiences as a woman, ruler, mother, and political strategist. Consequently, the multidimensional aspects of her identity remain underexplored within both historical and literary criticism.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* presents an alternative narrative by moving beyond conventional nationalist glorification and reconstructing Lakshmibai's life through an intimate exploration of her emotional world, personal dilemmas, and political consciousness. Despite the novel's significance, critical attention has largely focused on its historical authenticity, narrative style, or representation of colonial resistance. Comparatively little scholarship has examined the novel as a feminist reconfiguration

of historical memory that challenges patriarchal modes of historiography and reclaims women's voices from the margins of official history. This limited engagement leaves an important gap in understanding how contemporary historical fiction can function as a site of feminist intervention.

The present study addresses this gap by examining *Rani* through the combined perspectives of feminist historiography and postcolonial literary criticism. Drawing upon the theories of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee, the study investigates how Misra reconstructs history by foregrounding female agency, resistance, and subjectivity. It argues that the novel not only revisits a familiar historical episode but also interrogates the ideological assumptions embedded in colonial and patriarchal narratives. By analysing *Rani* as a feminist rewriting of history, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how historical fiction can recover silenced voices, challenge dominant historical paradigms, and reshape contemporary interpretations of gender, memory, and national identity.

1.5 Objectives and Significance of the Study

The present study seeks to examine Jaishree Misra's *Rani* as a significant work of feminist historical fiction that reinterprets the life of Rani Lakshmibai through the intersecting perspectives of feminist historiography and postcolonial literary criticism. While the queen has traditionally been celebrated as a national heroine and an icon of anti-colonial resistance, this study argues that Misra's narrative extends beyond conventional historical representations by foregrounding her emotional complexity, political consciousness, and individual agency. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine how Jaishree Misra reconstructs the historical identity of Rani Lakshmibai through the principles of feminist historiography.

2. To analyse the representation of gender, colonialism, and nationalism in *Rani* from feminist and postcolonial perspectives.
3. To investigate the narrative strategies employed by Misra to recover women's voices that have been marginalised within official historical discourse.
4. To interpret the novel through the theoretical frameworks of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee.
5. To evaluate *Rani* as a literary intervention that challenges patriarchal and colonial constructions of history while redefining women's agency in historical fiction.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between literature, history, gender, and power. By reading *Rani* through feminist historiography and postcolonial theory, the study demonstrates how historical fiction can function as a powerful medium for recovering voices that have been neglected or silenced within dominant historical narratives. It contributes to feminist literary studies by illustrating the ways in which women-centred narratives question patriarchal interpretations of history and reclaim female subjectivity. At the same time, it enriches postcolonial scholarship by examining how colonial discourse intersects with indigenous patriarchal structures in shaping historical memory. Furthermore, the study expands critical discussions on contemporary Indian English historical fiction by highlighting Jaishree Misra's contribution to the reimagining of national history through literary creativity. Ultimately, the article argues that *Rani* not only revisits the past but also invites readers to reconsider the politics of historical representation, thereby offering new insights into the continuing dialogue between history, memory, gender, and identity in contemporary literary studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Fiction, Feminist Historiography, and the Rewriting of History

Historical fiction has evolved from merely recreating past events to critically examining how history is produced, interpreted, and remembered. Contemporary scholars argue that history is not an objective record of the past but a selective narrative shaped by ideology, politics, and cultural values. Consequently, historical fiction has become an important literary space for recovering marginalised histories and questioning official historical accounts. Rather than simply illustrating historical events, it reconstructs the past through imagination while exposing the silences embedded within conventional historiography.

Linda Hutcheon (1988) significantly contributed to this perspective by proposing the concept of historiographic metafiction, arguing that historical fiction challenges the authority of historical writing by revealing its narrative and ideological foundations. Similarly, Hayden White (1973) demonstrated that historical narratives are themselves literary constructions organised through language and rhetorical strategies rather than neutral representations of facts. These theoretical interventions transformed literary criticism by recognising fiction as a legitimate medium for interrogating historical knowledge.

The emergence of feminist historiography further broadened this discussion by exposing the systematic exclusion of women from historical narratives. Joan Wallach Scott (1986) established gender as a critical category of historical analysis, encouraging scholars to reconsider how patriarchal assumptions shaped historical representation. Building upon this foundation, feminist historical fiction reconstructs women's experiences, political participation, and emotional lives that have often remained absent from official archives. Such narratives challenge the conventional separation between public history and private life, demonstrating that domestic experiences, motherhood, emotional resilience, and personal

relationships are integral components of historical change. Within postcolonial societies, these interventions become particularly significant because colonial historiography frequently marginalised indigenous voices while reinforcing patriarchal structures. This theoretical background provides an essential foundation for analysing Jaishree Misra's *Rani* as a feminist reinterpretation of history.

2.2 Women, Gender, and Historical Representation

The representation of women has become a central concern within contemporary literary criticism and feminist scholarship. Traditional historiography largely privileged political institutions, wars, and male leadership, relegating women to the margins of historical discourse. Feminist scholars have therefore sought to redefine historical inquiry by recovering women's voices and questioning the power structures that determine whose experiences become historically visible.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) profoundly reshaped discussions of representation and historical silence by arguing that women situated within colonial and patriarchal systems frequently remain unheard because dominant institutions control the production of knowledge. Her work inspired scholars to examine how literature can recover suppressed female subjectivities and create narrative spaces where marginalised women reclaim their voices.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) further challenged patriarchal literary traditions by exposing the restrictive stereotypes through which women have historically been represented. Their work encouraged critics to explore literary portrayals of women as politically aware, intellectually capable, and emotionally resilient individuals rather than passive figures confined to conventional gender roles. Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity added another important dimension by arguing that gender is socially constructed through repeated cultural

practices rather than determined by biology. Butler's ideas have enabled literary scholars to examine how historical fiction portrays women negotiating, resisting, and reconstructing socially imposed identities.

Recent scholarship increasingly recognises women not merely as victims of patriarchal oppression but as agents of political and social transformation. Historical fiction therefore becomes a powerful medium for illustrating how women's personal experiences intersect with broader historical developments. This perspective is particularly relevant to Misra's *Rani*, which portrays Rani Lakshmibai not only as a warrior queen but also as a mother, ruler, strategist, and emotionally complex historical figure whose experiences challenge conventional modes of historical representation.

2.3 Postcolonial Perspectives on Rewriting History

Postcolonial literary criticism has fundamentally transformed historical studies by questioning colonial representations and exposing the ideological foundations of imperial historiography. Rather than accepting colonial archives as objective historical records, postcolonial scholars argue that these narratives legitimised imperial authority while marginalising indigenous perspectives. Consequently, historical fiction has emerged as an important form of counter-history that reconstructs the past from the standpoint of the colonised.

Edward Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism demonstrated how colonial discourse constructed the East through stereotypes that justified imperial domination. His work encouraged scholars to investigate how literary texts challenge colonial representations and restore indigenous histories. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) further expanded postcolonial theory through concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and the Third Space, arguing that colonial identities are continuously negotiated rather than fixed. These ideas have influenced literary criticism by demonstrating

that resistance often emerges through negotiation and cultural transformation rather than direct political confrontation.

Partha Chatterjee (1993) highlighted another important dimension by examining how nationalist discourse often celebrated women as symbols of cultural purity while denying them independent historical agency. Contemporary historical fiction responds to this limitation by portraying women as autonomous political actors rather than symbolic national icons. Recent scholarship therefore recognises postcolonial historical fiction as an interdisciplinary practice that combines historical evidence with imaginative reconstruction to expose archival silences and recover marginalised perspectives. This theoretical framework is particularly useful for interpreting *Rani*, where Misra simultaneously critiques colonial domination and patriarchal nationalism while reconstructing Lakshmibai's multidimensional historical identity.

2.4 Critical Scholarship on Jaishree Misra

Jaishree Misra has established herself as an important contemporary Indian English novelist through her nuanced exploration of women's identities, emotional resilience, family relationships, migration, and cultural transformation. Scholars consistently recognise her fiction for foregrounding female subjectivity while critically examining patriarchal social structures. Studies of *Ancient Promises*, *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*, *Afterwards*, *Secrets and Lies*, and *A Love Story for My Sister* demonstrate Misra's sustained engagement with women's autonomy, identity formation, and resistance against restrictive social norms.

Critics also emphasise Misra's distinctive narrative style, characterised by psychological depth, introspection, accessible language, and emotional realism. Her novels frequently intertwine personal experiences with broader social concerns, illustrating how individual lives are shaped by larger cultural and political forces. Consequently, her fiction has attracted scholarly attention from feminist criticism, postcolonial

studies, cultural studies, and Indian English literature.

Despite this growing scholarship, relatively limited research has examined *Rani*, Misra's only historical novel. Existing studies primarily focus on historical authenticity, nationalist representation, or the Revolt of 1857, while comparatively little attention has been devoted to feminist historiography, gendered historical memory, and the recovery of female subjectivity. The ways in which Misra employs historical fiction to challenge patriarchal historiography therefore remain insufficiently explored.

2.5 Critical Studies on *Rani* and the Emerging Research Gap

Existing scholarship generally acknowledges *Rani* as an important contribution to Indian historical fiction, recognising Misra's ability to combine historical documentation with imaginative reconstruction. Researchers appreciate the novel's accessible narrative style, psychological characterisation, and reinterpretation of Rani Lakshmibai's life. Nationalist readings primarily celebrate Lakshmibai's courage, patriotism, and resistance to British rule, while historical studies focus largely on factual reconstruction and narrative authenticity.

Although recent critics have begun to discuss gender within the novel, feminist historiography has not received sustained scholarly attention. Existing studies rarely investigate how Misra reconstructs Lakshmibai's emotional, psychological, and political identity or how the novel simultaneously interrogates colonial discourse and patriarchal historiography. Likewise, few scholars integrate feminist literary criticism with postcolonial theory to examine the intersection of gender, colonialism, historical memory, and narrative authority.

The review of existing literature therefore reveals a significant research gap. Most studies remain confined to historical,

biographical, or nationalist interpretations, leaving insufficient analysis of *Rani* as a feminist rewriting of history. Furthermore, little attention has been devoted to Misra's narrative strategies for recovering women's voices and reconstructing female historical agency. Addressing these limitations, the present study employs an interdisciplinary framework that integrates the theories of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee to examine how *Rani* reimagines historical memory, challenges patriarchal and colonial narratives, and restores women to the centre of historical discourse. Through this approach, the study contributes to contemporary debates on feminist historiography, postcolonial literary criticism, and the transformative role of historical fiction in recovering silenced histories.

3. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The present study adopts an interdisciplinary conceptual and theoretical perspectives that integrates feminist historiography, feminist literary criticism, gender theory, postcolonial studies, and nationalist discourse to examine Jaishree Misra's *Rani*. Since the novel revisits one of India's most celebrated historical figures, a single theoretical perspective is insufficient to explain its complex engagement with history, gender, identity, and power. Instead, the study combines complementary theoretical approaches that collectively illuminate how historical fiction reconstructs the past by recovering women's experiences that have often remained absent from official historical narratives. These perspectives also explain how literary texts challenge patriarchal and colonial representations while presenting women as active historical agents rather than symbolic figures. Consequently, the selected framework provides a comprehensive foundation for analysing how *Rani* reimagines Rani Lakshmibai's life by foregrounding her political intelligence, emotional resilience, ethical leadership, and personal agency.

3.1 Feminist Historiography and the Recovery of Women's Voices

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is feminist historiography, which questions the patriarchal assumptions underlying conventional historical writing. Traditional historiography has predominantly focused on rulers, wars, political institutions, and military achievements, often neglecting the contributions and lived experiences of women. Feminist historians argue that history is not an objective record of the past but a selective construction influenced by cultural, political, and ideological interests. Their objective is therefore to recover women's voices and restore their rightful place within historical discourse.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern significantly strengthens this perspective. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak demonstrates that marginalised women are frequently denied opportunities to represent themselves because dominant social and political institutions speak on their behalf. As a result, women's experiences become filtered through patriarchal, colonial, or nationalist perspectives rather than their own voices. Feminist historiography attempts to challenge these silences by reconstructing alternative narratives that foreground women's agency, subjectivity, and historical significance.

Historical fiction serves as an effective medium for this process because it combines historical evidence with imaginative reconstruction. While historical documents preserve political facts, novels provide access to the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of history that official records often ignore. In *Rani*, Jaishree Misra presents Rani Lakshmibai not merely as a legendary warrior but as a multidimensional woman balancing queenship, motherhood, political leadership, and personal sacrifice. Through this portrayal, the novel restores a female perspective that has frequently been overshadowed by patriarchal historical narratives and demonstrates how

literature can contribute to a more inclusive understanding of history.

3.2 Gender Performativity, Identity, Power, and Resistance

The second theoretical foundation is Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, proposed in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler challenges the traditional belief that gender is a natural or biologically determined identity. Instead, she argues that gender is socially constructed through repeated behaviours, cultural practices, language, and institutional expectations. Masculinity and femininity therefore emerge through social performance rather than biological destiny.

Butler further explains that identities are continuously shaped through interactions with institutions such as the family, religion, education, law, and the state. Since gender depends upon repeated social practices, it remains open to reinterpretation and change. Whenever individuals depart from conventional gender expectations, they expose the constructed nature of those norms and create opportunities for social transformation. Resistance, therefore, is not limited to political rebellion but also includes everyday acts that redefine socially accepted identities.

This perspective is particularly valuable in analysing *Rani*. Lakshmibai's authority does not emerge from adopting masculine models of leadership but from integrating qualities traditionally associated with both femininity and political power. She combines compassion, determination, intelligence, diplomacy, and courage while fulfilling multiple roles as queen, mother, widow, and military leader. Misra therefore presents leadership as a product of capability rather than gender, demonstrating that women can successfully redefine political authority without abandoning their feminine identity. Butler's theory thus provides an important framework for understanding how the novel challenges rigid gender norms and reimagines female leadership.

3.3 Patriarchal Narration and Female Voice

The third theoretical perspective is based on Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential feminist criticism presented in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Their work reveals how patriarchal literary traditions have historically controlled the representation of women by confining them to simplistic stereotypes such as the obedient "angel" or the rebellious "madwoman." These binary images deny women their individuality and reinforce patriarchal authority by reducing female identity to socially acceptable categories.

Gilbert and Gubar also argue that women have frequently appeared as characters whose stories are narrated by men rather than by themselves. Feminist literature therefore seeks to restore narrative authority by enabling women to articulate their own experiences, emotions, and perspectives. Recovering women's voices involves not only increasing female representation but also transforming narrative structures so that women become creators of meaning rather than passive subjects.

This framework is especially relevant to Misra's *Rani*. Conventional historical accounts generally celebrate Lakshmibai as a fearless warrior and patriotic icon, yet they seldom explore her emotional conflicts, personal relationships, or political reasoning. Misra challenges these limited portrayals by presenting Lakshmibai as a complex historical individual whose leadership arises from intelligence, compassion, resilience, and ethical responsibility. Readers encounter her inner reflections alongside her public achievements, allowing her to emerge as an autonomous historical subject rather than merely a symbolic national heroine. Consequently, the novel challenges patriarchal storytelling and restores women's voices to the centre of historical interpretation.

3.4 Postcolonial Theory: Hybridity, Ambivalence, and Resistance

The fourth theoretical foundation is derived from Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, particularly his concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance. Bhabha argues that colonialism functioned not only through political domination but also through cultural representation, language, and the production of historical knowledge. Colonial authority attempted to shape identities and historical memory, making literature an important space for questioning imperial narratives.

Hybridity explains that cultural identities emerge through interaction rather than remaining fixed or pure. Ambivalence highlights the unstable and contradictory nature of colonial power, demonstrating that colonial authority constantly depended upon negotiation with the colonised. Bhabha also broadens the meaning of resistance by suggesting that opposition to colonialism includes cultural reinterpretation, intellectual independence, and the rejection of colonial definitions of identity alongside military confrontation.

These ideas provide valuable insights into *Rani*. Misra portrays Lakshmibai as a ruler negotiating indigenous traditions, administrative responsibilities, and colonial pressures. Her resistance extends beyond the battlefield to include political judgement, diplomatic negotiation, and the defence of cultural sovereignty. Rather than depicting colonial history as a simple conflict between two opposing groups, the novel presents a complex interaction between colonial authority and indigenous leadership. Through this nuanced representation, *Rani* becomes a postcolonial reconstruction that restores indigenous perspectives and challenges colonial interpretations of Indian history.

3.5 Nation, Gender, and Cultural Identity

The final theoretical perspective is informed by Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), which examines the relationship between nationalism, gender, and cultural identity. Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalism often portrayed women as custodians

of tradition, morality, and national culture while simultaneously restricting their participation in public and political life. Although women were honoured as symbols of the nation, their independent political contributions frequently remained unrecognised.

His distinction between the "home" and the "world" demonstrates how nationalist discourse separated domestic life from public politics. Women were expected to preserve cultural values within the domestic sphere, whereas governance and political leadership were considered masculine responsibilities. Feminist scholars have subsequently argued that such symbolic representations obscure women's historical agency.

Misra's *Rani* directly challenges this ideological separation. Lakshmibai's responsibilities as queen, mother, widow, and political leader are presented as interconnected dimensions of her identity rather than isolated social roles. Her domestic experiences strengthen her political judgement instead of limiting it, while her leadership emerges from strategic thinking, ethical conviction, and personal resilience. Misra therefore transforms Lakshmibai from a symbolic nationalist heroine into an autonomous historical figure capable of independent political decision-making. The novel successfully dissolves the boundary between private and public life, demonstrating that women's personal experiences and political responsibilities are inseparable.

The integration of feminist historiography, Butler's theory of gender performativity, Gilbert and Gubar's feminist literary criticism, Bhabha's postcolonial theory, and Chatterjee's analysis of nationalism establishes a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework for this study. Collectively, these perspectives explain how *Rani* recovers women's voices, challenges patriarchal and colonial representations, redefines gender and political authority, and reconstructs historical memory from a feminist standpoint. More

importantly, the framework demonstrates that Jaishree Misra's novel is not merely a historical retelling but a critical literary intervention that reimagines Rani Lakshmibai as a politically conscious, emotionally complex, and historically significant woman. Through this interdisciplinary lens, the study highlights the novel's contribution to feminist historical writing, postcolonial literary criticism, and contemporary debates on gender, identity, and nationhood.

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine the feminist reconstruction of history and the representation of women's agency in Jaishree Misra's *Rani*. Since the research seeks to interpret meanings, narrative structures, ideological positions, and literary representations rather than quantify observable variables, a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate. Literary texts are complex cultural artefacts that embody historical, political, and social discourses, requiring interpretive analysis rather than statistical investigation. Accordingly, the study focuses on understanding how *Rani* reimagines the life of Rani Lakshmibai through feminist and postcolonial perspectives while interrogating patriarchal and colonial constructions of history.

Qualitative literary research enables the researcher to examine the intricate relationship between text, context, and ideology. Unlike empirical methods that rely on numerical data, qualitative inquiry emphasises interpretation, contextual understanding, and critical engagement with textual evidence. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of narrative voice, characterisation, symbolism, historical representation, and ideological positioning within the novel. The methodology therefore aligns with the central objective of the study, namely to investigate how Jaishree Misra transforms a well-known historical figure into a multidimensional female protagonist whose experiences challenge dominant historical narratives.

The research follows an interpretive research design, which is widely employed in literary and cultural studies to understand how meanings are constructed within texts. Interpretivism assumes that literary works do not possess a single, fixed meaning; instead, they generate multiple interpretations shaped by historical circumstances, cultural contexts, and theoretical perspectives. The present study therefore interprets *Rani* as a literary reconstruction of history that simultaneously engages with feminism, postcolonialism, and historiography. Rather than treating the novel merely as a fictional retelling of historical events, the research analyses it as a critical intervention that questions established assumptions regarding gender, colonialism, nationalism, and historical memory.

Within this interpretive framework, the study adopts a textual research design. Textual analysis allows the researcher to examine how language, narrative techniques, dialogue, symbolism, imagery, and character development contribute to the production of meaning. Every narrative decision made by the author—including point of view, description, sequence of events, and portrayal of historical characters—is treated as a meaningful literary strategy. Through textual analysis, the study investigates how Misra reconstructs Rani Lakshmibai's identity, negotiates historical authenticity, and challenges patriarchal representations embedded within conventional historiography. This design enables the researcher to explore both explicit and implicit meanings embedded in the narrative while recognising literature as an important medium for historical reinterpretation.

The primary source for this investigation is Jaishree Misra's novel *Rani*, which forms the central corpus of analysis. The novel has been selected because it offers a contemporary feminist reimagining of one of India's most celebrated historical figures. Unlike traditional historical biographies that emphasise military achievements and nationalist heroism, *Rani* foregrounds Lakshmibai's emotional experiences,

political consciousness, interpersonal relationships, and evolving leadership. The analysis focuses on narrative episodes, character interactions, descriptive passages, dialogues, and representations of power that illustrate the novel's engagement with feminist historiography and postcolonial discourse. By concentrating on the text itself, the research seeks to identify the literary strategies through which Misra reconstructs history from a gender-conscious perspective.

To strengthen the interpretive analysis, the study also draws upon a wide range of secondary sources. These include scholarly books on feminist literary criticism, feminist historiography, postcolonial theory, historical fiction, and narrative criticism. Foundational theoretical works by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee provide the conceptual framework for analysing the novel. In addition, peer-reviewed journal articles published in reputed national and international journals are consulted to examine recent developments in feminist literary studies, historical fiction, gender studies, and postcolonial criticism. Historical documents, biographies of Rani Lakshmibai, archival materials, and scholarly histories of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 are also examined to understand the historical background against which Misra's fictional reconstruction operates. These secondary sources provide historical, theoretical, and critical perspectives that support and contextualise the textual interpretation.

The study employs close reading as its principal method of literary analysis. Close reading involves careful and systematic examination of selected passages to identify significant patterns of language, symbolism, imagery, narrative voice, characterisation, and thematic development. Rather than summarising the plot, close reading investigates how meaning is produced through specific literary choices. Particular attention is paid to scenes that depict Lakshmibai's political decisions, personal

struggles, interactions with colonial authorities, expressions of motherhood, experiences of loss, and acts of resistance. Through detailed textual examination, the study demonstrates how these narrative elements collectively contribute to the novel's feminist reinterpretation of history.

In addition to close reading, the research adopts thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas and conceptual patterns throughout the novel. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to organise textual evidence into coherent analytical categories that correspond with the objectives of the study. Themes such as female agency, historical memory, colonial domination, nationalism, identity formation, motherhood, leadership, resistance, gender discrimination, and political authority are systematically examined. Rather than treating these themes as isolated topics, the study explores the relationships among them to demonstrate how Misra constructs a multidimensional representation of Lakshmibai. This thematic approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the ideological and cultural concerns embedded within the narrative.

The methodology further incorporates critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how language reflects and challenges relations of power within the novel. Critical discourse analysis is particularly useful for investigating the ways in which colonial authority, patriarchal ideology, and nationalist discourse are represented through dialogue, narration, and character interactions. The study analyses how language constructs social hierarchies, legitimises authority, and shapes historical consciousness. Simultaneously, it investigates how Misra's narrative subverts dominant discourses by granting narrative agency to a woman whose voice has often been marginalised within colonial and patriarchal historiography. Through CDA, the research reveals that language functions not merely as a medium of storytelling but also as an instrument of ideological negotiation and resistance.

The analytical process is guided by an integrated theoretical framework that combines feminism, postcolonialism, and narrative criticism. Feminist theory provides the foundation for examining the recovery of women's voices, gender identity, patriarchal narration, and female agency. The works of Spivak, Butler, and Gilbert and Gubar enable the study to investigate how Lakshmibai's identity is reconstructed beyond conventional patriarchal stereotypes. Postcolonial theory, particularly the writings of Homi K. Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee, facilitates an exploration of colonial power, cultural identity, nationalism, hybridity, and resistance. Narrative criticism complements these perspectives by examining the structural and stylistic features through which the novel constructs historical meaning. Together, these theoretical approaches enable a multidimensional interpretation that recognises the intersection of gender, history, culture, politics, and narrative form.

The analytical procedure follows a systematic sequence. Initially, the novel is read multiple times to obtain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative structure and thematic concerns. Relevant passages relating to historical representation, gender relations, colonial encounters, political leadership, and female agency are then identified and categorised. These passages are subjected to close textual analysis before being interpreted through the selected theoretical perspectives. Comparisons are subsequently made between the fictional representation of Lakshmibai and established historical narratives in order to identify areas of convergence, reinterpretation, and subversion. Throughout the analysis, textual evidence is critically correlated with theoretical concepts and existing scholarly literature to ensure analytical coherence and academic rigour.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, the study employs methodological triangulation by integrating primary textual analysis with theoretical scholarship and historical

documentation. Interpretations are not based upon isolated textual examples but are supported through consistent patterns identified across the novel and corroborated by relevant academic sources. The use of multiple theoretical perspectives further strengthens the analytical validity by enabling the text to be examined from complementary viewpoints rather than through a single interpretive lens. Such triangulation minimises subjective bias while ensuring a balanced and comprehensive interpretation of the literary work.

Like all qualitative literary studies, the present research has certain limitations. First, the investigation is confined to a single literary text—Jaishree Misra's *Rani*. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to all historical novels dealing with Rani Lakshmibai or feminist historical fiction as a whole. Second, the study focuses primarily on literary representation rather than establishing the historical accuracy of every event depicted in the novel. Since historical fiction inevitably combines documented history with imaginative reconstruction, the research emphasises narrative interpretation instead of factual verification. Third, although the study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, it does not attempt to examine psychological, linguistic, sociological, or reader-response perspectives in detail. Finally, as qualitative interpretation is inherently influenced by scholarly judgement, alternative readings of the text may also be possible. Nevertheless, the systematic application of recognised theoretical frameworks, rigorous textual analysis, and sustained engagement with contemporary scholarship ensure that the interpretations presented remain academically credible, logically coherent, and firmly grounded in textual evidence.

Overall, the adopted methodology provides a comprehensive framework for analysing *Rani* as a feminist and postcolonial reimagining of history. By integrating qualitative inquiry, interpretive textual analysis, close reading, thematic analysis, critical discourse

analysis, and interdisciplinary literary theory, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how Jaishree Misra reconstructs the life of Rani Lakshmibai while challenging patriarchal historiography and colonial narratives. This methodological approach ultimately enables the research to fulfil its objective of demonstrating that historical fiction serves not merely as a recreation of the past but as a critical space for recovering silenced voices, questioning dominant ideologies, and reimagining history through the perspective of women.

5. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* offers a feminist reinterpretation of Indian nationalist history by presenting Rani Lakshmibai through her own experiences rather than through the conventional narratives of heroism and warfare. Instead of focusing solely on the political events of the Revolt of 1857, the novel foregrounds the queen's emotional resilience, moral convictions, and intellectual strength. This narrative shift transforms Lakshmibai from a legendary symbol into a historically grounded woman whose personal experiences become central to understanding national history. In doing so, the novel reflects the principles of feminist historiography, which seeks to recover women's voices that have often been overlooked in traditional historical writing.

A significant achievement of the novel is its emphasis on female subjectivity. Misra allows readers to witness historical events through Lakshmibai's own thoughts, emotions, and decisions rather than through colonial records or nationalist interpretations. This approach restores narrative authority to a woman who has long been represented by others, thereby recognising her as an active participant in shaping history. The novel also demonstrates that personal experiences such as motherhood, widowhood, and emotional loss are not separate from political leadership but are closely connected to the formation of historical agency. By integrating the private and public spheres,

Misra challenges the conventional belief that domestic life is historically insignificant.

Furthermore, *Rani* humanises Lakshmibai by portraying her struggles, uncertainties, and ethical dilemmas alongside her courage and determination. This balanced representation moves beyond nationalist mythmaking and presents heroism as a product of resilience, responsibility, and informed judgement. The novel resonates with the feminist ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Judith Butler, and Partha Chatterjee by recovering women's voices, challenging patriarchal narratives, and recognising women as autonomous historical subjects. Consequently, Misra demonstrates that rewriting national history requires placing women's lived experiences at the centre of historical interpretation, thereby creating a more inclusive and representative understanding of the past.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* reimagines Rani Lakshmibai as a multidimensional historical figure whose identity extends far beyond the familiar image of the fearless warrior queen. While colonial and nationalist histories primarily celebrate her military resistance during the Revolt of 1857, Misra broadens this perspective by portraying her as a woman shaped by personal relationships, emotional resilience, ethical conviction, and political wisdom. This human-centred approach moves beyond heroic mythology and presents Lakshmibai as an individual whose leadership develops through lived experience rather than battlefield triumph alone.

A defining feature of the novel is its integration of Lakshmibai's multiple identities as a mother, queen, widow, and political leader. Motherhood is presented not merely as a domestic responsibility but as a source of compassion, moral strength, and commitment to public welfare. Similarly, her queenship is depicted as a continuous process of governance requiring diplomacy, justice, and administrative

competence. Misra also reinterprets widowhood by portraying it as a turning point that strengthens Lakshmibai's political determination rather than limiting her social role. These interconnected identities demonstrate that private experiences and public responsibilities collectively shape her historical agency.

The novel further challenges patriarchal assumptions about female leadership by showing that Lakshmibai's authority arises from integrity, empathy, and strategic judgement rather than masculine models of power. Her leadership is characterised by consultation, responsibility, and concern for her people, illustrating that courage and compassion can coexist in effective governance. Misra also resists reducing Lakshmibai to a nationalist icon by highlighting her emotional struggles, personal sacrifices, and moral dilemmas. This balanced portrayal reflects feminist perspectives that recover women's voices and reject restrictive stereotypes. Ultimately, *Rani* dismantles the traditional warrior myth by presenting Lakshmibai as a complete human being whose enduring significance lies not only in military resistance but also in her emotional strength, political intelligence, ethical leadership, and unwavering commitment to justice.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* presents colonialism and patriarchy as interconnected systems of domination that shape the life and leadership of Rani Lakshmibai. Rather than depicting the conflict solely as a struggle against British rule, the novel demonstrates that Lakshmibai also confronts deeply rooted patriarchal structures within her own society. This dual struggle illustrates the concept of double oppression, where colonial authority and gender discrimination reinforce one another, restricting women's political agency and historical recognition.

The novel exposes British colonial power not only as a political force but also as an ideological system that questions the legitimacy of indigenous governance. Through the Doctrine

of Lapse, colonial administrators deny Lakshmibai's right to rule by rejecting her adopted heir and imposing imperial legal principles over local traditions. At the same time, her authority is challenged because she is a woman occupying a position traditionally reserved for men. Misra reveals that colonial prejudice and patriarchal assumptions work together to undermine her leadership, making her political legitimacy a constant site of contestation.

Misra also highlights that patriarchal oppression exists independently of colonial rule. Social expectations surrounding widowhood, femininity, and queenship subject Lakshmibai to greater scrutiny than her male counterparts. Nevertheless, she transforms these limitations into sources of strength, demonstrating that effective leadership is founded on intelligence, moral conviction, and resilience rather than gender. Her resistance therefore extends beyond military opposition to include the rejection of cultural norms that deny women authority.

From a feminist and postcolonial perspective, the novel resonates with the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Judith Butler, and Partha Chatterjee by exposing how colonial discourse and patriarchal ideology jointly silence women's voices. Misra restores Lakshmibai's historical agency by portraying her as an autonomous leader whose struggle encompasses political freedom, gender equality, and cultural dignity. Consequently, *Rani* redefines resistance as a multidimensional process that challenges imperial domination, patriarchal power, and historical marginalisation simultaneously.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* explores the relationship between voice, silence, and agency by presenting Rani Lakshmibai as an active interpreter of her own history rather than a figure defined by colonial or nationalist narratives. The novel challenges the tendency of conventional historiography to speak for women instead of allowing them to express their own experiences. By placing Lakshmibai at the centre of the

narrative, Misra restores her historical subjectivity and transforms her from a symbolic heroine into a conscious historical individual. This feminist approach demonstrates that recovering women's voices is essential to constructing a more balanced understanding of the past.

The novel closely reflects Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern by highlighting how women's voices have often been mediated through colonial records, patriarchal traditions, and nationalist interpretations. Misra responds to this historical silence by reconstructing Lakshmibai's inner world, allowing readers to understand her thoughts, emotions, and political decisions from her own perspective. Her voice develops gradually through personal loss, administrative responsibility, and resistance to colonial intervention, illustrating that agency is shaped through lived experience rather than granted by institutions.

Misra also offers a nuanced understanding of silence. Instead of portraying silence as weakness or submission, the novel presents it as a complex response to unequal power structures. At times, Lakshmibai's silence reflects grief and reflection, while in other situations it becomes a deliberate strategy that prepares the way for decisive action. Likewise, patriarchal expectations surrounding widowhood, femininity, and queenship attempt to restrict her participation in public life. By refusing to remain confined within these social limitations, Lakshmibai transforms imposed silence into purposeful political action. The novel therefore suggests that agency often begins with questioning the cultural norms that suppress women's voices.

Furthermore, *Rani* expands the meaning of agency beyond military resistance. Misra portrays leadership through ethical judgement, emotional resilience, administrative competence, and thoughtful decision-making. Lakshmibai's personal experiences influence her political choices, demonstrating that emotional intelligence strengthens rather than weakens

leadership. This perspective resonates with the feminist ideas of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Judith Butler, and Homi K. Bhabha, all of whom emphasise the recovery of women's voices, the fluidity of identity, and resistance to dominant narratives. Ultimately, the novel transforms silence into a source of self-definition and historical agency, reaffirming that women are not passive subjects of history but active participants in shaping its course.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* reconceptualises the feminine body as a political space where gender, identity, and resistance intersect. Rather than presenting the female body as a passive object shaped by history, the novel portrays it as a dynamic site through which authority is negotiated and patriarchal as well as colonial power is challenged. Rani Lakshmibai's journey from princess to queen, widow, mother, and military leader demonstrates that female identity is continuously shaped by changing social expectations while retaining the capacity to redefine those expectations. In doing so, Misra transforms the female body into a symbol of historical agency rather than social control.

This interpretation reflects Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is not biologically fixed but socially constructed through repeated cultural practices. Misra illustrates this idea by showing how Lakshmibai negotiates different social roles throughout her life. Although patriarchal society expects her to remain confined within conventional notions of femininity, she gradually expands the meaning of womanhood through governance, diplomacy, and military leadership. Importantly, she does not reject her feminine identity; instead, she demonstrates that qualities such as compassion, emotional intelligence, and ethical responsibility can coexist with political authority. The novel therefore challenges the belief that leadership must be associated with masculine behaviour.

The novel also portrays the female body as a site of resistance against colonial and

patriarchal domination. Colonial discourse often represented Indian women as passive and dependent, thereby justifying imperial intervention. Misra rejects these stereotypes by depicting Lakshmibai's public presence, administrative leadership, and military participation as expressions of sovereignty and self-determination. Her body occupies political spaces traditionally reserved for men, disrupting established gender hierarchies and demonstrating that resistance is expressed not only through warfare but also through everyday acts of leadership and decision-making.

Furthermore, Misra humanises Lakshmibai by presenting her body as vulnerable as well as resilient. Experiences of grief, exhaustion, affection, and sacrifice remain central to her identity, making her achievements more authentic and relatable. From a broader feminist perspective, the novel suggests that controlling women's bodies has long been a means of controlling their social and political agency. By refusing to accept these limitations, Lakshmibai reclaims both physical and symbolic space. Her portrayal resonates with the ideas of Butler, Spivak, Gilbert and Gubar, and Bhabha, all of whom emphasise identity, resistance, and the recovery of marginalised voices. Ultimately, *Rani* presents the feminine body as an active force in history, demonstrating that women's agency is expressed through lived experience, political participation, and the continual redefinition of gendered identity.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* challenges the traditional separation between the domestic and political spheres by presenting the home as an important site of political consciousness and resistance. Instead of treating the palace, family, and motherhood as private spaces detached from history, the novel demonstrates that these experiences shape leadership, ethical values, and anti-colonial struggle. Through *Rani* Lakshmibai's life, Misra redefines the relationship between home, nation, and woman, showing that domestic life provides the moral and emotional foundation for political action. This

interpretation also offers a feminist reworking of Partha Chatterjee's concept of the relationship between the "home" and the "world."

Misra illustrates that Lakshmibai's domestic responsibilities are closely connected to her role as a ruler. Her experiences within the palace, her attachment to family, and her concern for the welfare of Jhansi cultivate qualities such as compassion, justice, resilience, and responsibility. These values later guide her political decisions and strengthen her resistance to colonial rule. The novel also transforms the palace into a political space where important decisions are discussed, relationships are formed, and leadership is shaped. In this way, Misra rejects the patriarchal assumption that meaningful political activity occurs only in public institutions or on the battlefield.

A major contribution of the novel is its reinterpretation of motherhood as a source of political strength rather than domestic limitation. Lakshmibai's love for her adopted son gradually extends to the people of Jhansi, making care, empathy, and moral responsibility central to her governance. Likewise, Jhansi itself becomes more than a kingdom; it is portrayed as a shared home whose protection represents both personal commitment and national duty. By carrying domestic values into the public sphere, Lakshmibai demonstrates that effective leadership can emerge from experiences traditionally associated with women. Misra also rejects the belief that women must choose between family and political responsibility, presenting Lakshmibai's identities as mother, widow, queen, and leader as complementary rather than conflicting.

From a feminist perspective, *Rani* restores women as active political agents instead of symbolic guardians of the nation. The novel resonates with the ideas of Spivak, Judith Butler, Gilbert and Gubar, and Homi Bhabha by emphasising the recovery of women's voices, the fluidity of identity, and resistance through everyday social practices. Ultimately, Misra

demonstrates that domestic space is not separate from political history but is one of its most significant foundations. By integrating home, nation, and woman into a unified narrative, *Rani* expands the meaning of political resistance and shows that the struggle for freedom begins not only on the battlefield but also within the intimate spaces where identity, responsibility, and collective values are nurtured.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* demonstrates how historical fiction can function as a form of counter-history by challenging conventional interpretations of the past and recovering voices overlooked by official historiography. Rather than merely recreating historical events, the novel questions the authority of traditional historical narratives and broadens historical understanding by foregrounding lived experiences that archival records often ignore. Misra does not reject documented history; instead, she complements it by presenting alternative perspectives that reveal the emotional, social, and political dimensions of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Through this approach, *Rani* establishes historical fiction as an important medium for reinterpreting the past.

The novel challenges the assumption that official archives alone provide a complete account of history. Government records, colonial reports, and military documents generally privilege political institutions and public events while leaving little space for the inner lives of women and other marginalised groups. Misra addresses these silences by reconstructing Lakshmibai's emotions, ethical dilemmas, relationships, and personal reflections. In doing so, she demonstrates that historical truth extends beyond documented facts and includes the human experiences that official records cannot adequately capture. The novel also highlights the importance of personal narratives, showing that motherhood, grief, responsibility, and moral conviction significantly influence political leadership and historical change.

A major contribution of *Rani* is its recovery of forgotten voices. Although Rani

Lakshmibai occupies a celebrated place in Indian history, her individuality has often been overshadowed by colonial stereotypes and nationalist mythmaking. Misra restores her humanity by portraying her as a thoughtful, emotionally complex, and ethically responsible leader rather than merely a legendary warrior. The novel also acknowledges the contributions of women and ordinary individuals whose lives rarely appear in official historical records, thereby expanding the scope of historical significance beyond celebrated political figures.

From a feminist and postcolonial perspective, *Rani* reflects the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee by recovering marginalised voices, challenging patriarchal and colonial narratives, and recognising women as active historical agents. Ultimately, Misra presents historical fiction as a meaningful form of historical inquiry that encourages readers to question established narratives and recognise the limitations of archival history. By restoring emotional depth and historical agency to Rani Lakshmibai, the novel demonstrates that history becomes more inclusive when forgotten voices are brought into the centre of historical interpretation.

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* culminates in a powerful feminist reconstruction of history through the concept of "Her-story." Rather than replacing conventional history, the novel reinterprets it by placing women's experiences at the centre of historical understanding. Misra argues that national history remains incomplete when it privileges masculine achievements while overlooking women's intellectual, emotional, and political contributions. Through the life of Rani Lakshmibai, the novel demonstrates that history becomes more inclusive and meaningful when women's voices are recognised as essential to the nation's collective memory. In this way, *Rani* moves beyond historical fiction to become an important contribution to feminist historiography and postcolonial literary criticism.

One of the novel's major achievements is its transformation of Lakshmibai from a legendary icon into a fully realised historical individual. Instead of presenting her only as a patriotic warrior, Misra reveals her emotional struggles, ethical dilemmas, political judgement, and personal relationships. By integrating private experiences with public responsibilities, the novel dissolves the traditional distinction between domestic life and political history. Lakshmibai's roles as mother, widow, queen, and leader are shown to be interconnected, demonstrating that personal experiences significantly influence political decisions and historical change. This human-centred portrayal exemplifies the essence of "Her-story," where women are remembered for their lived experiences rather than merely for their symbolic value.

The novel also challenges both patriarchal and colonial interpretations of history. Misra presents Lakshmibai as an independent political thinker whose leadership is founded on intelligence, ethical conviction, compassion, and administrative ability. By reconstructing her story from an indigenous feminist perspective, the novel contests colonial narratives that questioned women's political legitimacy and nationalist narratives that reduced them to idealised symbols. Agency is therefore represented not only through military resistance but also through governance, diplomacy, reflection, and moral courage. This broader understanding of leadership highlights the diverse ways women influence historical development.

From a theoretical perspective, *Rani* reflects the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee by recovering silenced voices, challenging patriarchal narratives, and reimagining historical memory through feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Ultimately, Misra demonstrates that historical fiction can complement academic historiography by restoring the emotional and human dimensions often absent from official records. *Rani* affirms that history is an evolving

dialogue enriched by multiple voices, and that women's experiences are indispensable to any complete understanding of the past. Through this feminist reconstruction of historical memory, the novel redefines Lakshmibai not only as a national heroine but also as an autonomous historical subject whose life continues to reshape the way history is written and remembered.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study demonstrate that Jaishree Misra's *Rani* makes a substantial contribution to contemporary feminist historical fiction by reinterpreting the life of Rani Lakshmibai through an interdisciplinary framework that integrates feminist historiography, postcolonial theory, and narrative criticism. While previous scholarship has acknowledged Lakshmibai as an enduring symbol of anti-colonial resistance, this study argues that Misra's novel significantly extends existing historical and literary representations by foregrounding her subjectivity, emotional consciousness, political agency, and multidimensional identity. Consequently, the novel not only revisits a familiar historical figure but also redefines the manner in which women's histories can be written, interpreted, and remembered within contemporary literary discourse.

The findings correspond with existing scholarship on feminist historiography, particularly the view that conventional historical narratives have systematically privileged masculine experiences while marginalising women's contributions to political and social history. Scholars such as Joan Wallach Scott have argued that gender is a fundamental category for historical analysis, while Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has highlighted the epistemic exclusion of colonised women from dominant systems of knowledge. The present study reinforces these theoretical positions by demonstrating that *Rani* restores historical visibility to a woman whose experiences have often been mediated through colonial documentation and nationalist

mythology. However, unlike many earlier studies that primarily examine feminist historiography at a theoretical level, this research illustrates how contemporary historical fiction actively performs the work of historical recovery through literary imagination and narrative reconstruction.

The study also aligns with postcolonial literary scholarship, which has consistently questioned the authority of colonial archives and Eurocentric historical interpretations. Earlier research has shown that colonial narratives frequently portrayed indigenous rulers through ideological frameworks designed to legitimise imperial rule. The present analysis confirms this observation by illustrating how Misra exposes the limitations of colonial discourse while reconstructing Lakshmibai's political identity from an indigenous perspective. At the same time, the findings extend existing scholarship by revealing that colonial domination in the novel operates alongside patriarchal structures, producing an intersectional form of oppression that shapes women's historical experiences. Rather than treating colonialism and patriarchy as independent systems, the novel demonstrates their mutual reinforcement, thereby contributing a more integrated understanding of power within postcolonial historical fiction.

The findings further complement studies of historical fiction that regard literary narratives as important alternatives to conventional historiography. Scholars such as Linda Hutcheon have argued that historical fiction questions the certainty of official history by foregrounding multiple perspectives and exposing the constructed nature of historical narratives. The present study supports this interpretation by showing that *Rani* functions as a form of counter-history that recovers experiences omitted from official archives. Nevertheless, the analysis also demonstrates that Misra's novel moves beyond merely questioning historical certainty. Instead, it reconstructs historical consciousness by integrating emotional, psychological, ethical, and gendered experiences into the broader narrative of national history. This emphasis on female

subjectivity represents an important development within contemporary historical fiction and distinguishes *Rani* from many traditional historical narratives centred primarily on political events.

A notable contribution of the present study lies in its examination of Rani Lakshmibai beyond the established warrior myth. Existing scholarship has predominantly celebrated Lakshmibai as a nationalist heroine whose military resistance symbolises India's struggle against British colonialism. While these interpretations remain historically significant, they often concentrate on her public achievements at the expense of her personal experiences. The present analysis demonstrates that Misra deliberately reconstructs Lakshmibai as a mother, queen, widow, administrator, political strategist, and emotionally resilient woman. This multidimensional interpretation enriches current scholarship by illustrating that historical leadership is shaped not only by battlefield heroism but also by ethical judgement, emotional intelligence, domestic responsibility, and personal resilience. Consequently, the study broadens the understanding of female leadership within both literary criticism and feminist historiography.

Another important finding concerns the novel's reinterpretation of voice, silence, and agency. Previous feminist studies have frequently examined women's silence as evidence of historical exclusion. While the present study supports this perspective, it also demonstrates that *Rani* transforms silence into a productive narrative space from which agency gradually emerges. Lakshmibai's political consciousness develops through reflection, experience, and moral responsibility rather than through immediate confrontation alone. This nuanced understanding of agency extends earlier feminist interpretations by illustrating that resistance may be expressed through ethical decision-making, emotional resilience, and strategic negotiation as much as through overt political action. Such an interpretation contributes to ongoing scholarly

discussions regarding the diverse forms through which women exercise historical influence.

The originality of the present research lies primarily in its integrated analytical framework. Although individual studies have examined *Rani* from historical, feminist, or postcolonial perspectives, relatively little attention has been devoted to analysing the novel through the combined lenses of feminist historiography, gender performativity, patriarchal narration, postcolonial hybridity, and nationalist discourse. By synthesising the theoretical contributions of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee, the study provides a comprehensive interpretative model that reveals the multiple ideological layers operating within the novel. This interdisciplinary approach enables a richer understanding of how gender, history, colonialism, identity, and narrative intersect within contemporary historical fiction.

The research also contributes to the growing field of women-centred historical narratives by demonstrating that historical fiction possesses considerable scholarly value beyond its literary appeal. Rather than viewing fiction as secondary to documentary history, the study argues that imaginative literature complements historiography by recovering emotional realities, interpersonal relationships, and subjective experiences that official records frequently overlook. In doing so, the research supports the broader movement within the humanities toward more inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches to historical knowledge. It suggests that literary texts can function as important sites of historical inquiry, particularly when investigating the experiences of groups traditionally underrepresented within archival documentation.

The implications of this study extend to several areas of academic research. For literary studies, the findings encourage further examination of contemporary historical novels as interventions in historiographical debates rather

than merely fictional representations of the past. For feminist scholarship, the study reinforces the importance of recovering women's voices through interdisciplinary methodologies that combine literary criticism with historical analysis. Within postcolonial studies, the research highlights the need to investigate the interconnected nature of colonial domination and patriarchal authority instead of examining these structures independently. Finally, for historical studies, the research demonstrates that literature can contribute meaningfully to the reconstruction of historical memory by illuminating dimensions of experience absent from conventional documentary sources.

Overall, the findings establish that Jaishree Misra's *Rani* is far more than a retelling of a well-known historical episode. It is a sophisticated literary intervention that challenges patriarchal historiography, contests colonial representations, reconstructs female subjectivity, and expands the possibilities of historical fiction as a medium of historical recovery. By integrating feminist, postcolonial, and narrative perspectives, the novel offers a richer and more inclusive understanding of Rani Lakshmibai's historical significance while simultaneously contributing to broader debates concerning gender, history, memory, and national identity. The present study therefore affirms that *Rani* occupies an important place within contemporary feminist historical fiction and provides a valuable model for future research exploring the intersections of literature and historiography.

7. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine Jaishree Misra's *Rani* through the interconnected perspectives of feminist historiography, postcolonial theory, gender performativity, and narrative criticism to understand how the novel reconstructs the historical image of Rani Lakshmibai. Moving beyond conventional interpretations that predominantly celebrate Lakshmibai as a nationalist icon and military

heroine, the research explored the ways in which Misra reimagines her as a multidimensional historical subject whose political leadership, emotional resilience, ethical consciousness, and personal experiences collectively redefine the meaning of women's agency in history. The analysis demonstrates that *Rani* is not merely a fictional retelling of a familiar historical episode but a significant literary intervention that questions dominant historical narratives and contributes to a more inclusive understanding of India's historical memory.

One of the principal findings of this study is that Misra successfully challenges the limitations of traditional historiography by restoring women's voices to the centre of historical discourse. Conventional historical writing has frequently privileged political institutions, military campaigns, and male leadership while treating women's experiences as secondary or symbolic. *Rani* contests this imbalance by foregrounding Lakshmibai's inner consciousness, ethical struggles, political judgement, and emotional complexity. The novel demonstrates that historical significance cannot be measured solely through public achievements or military victories but must also acknowledge the intellectual and emotional processes that shape historical action. Through this reconstruction, Misra transforms Lakshmibai from a static historical icon into a dynamic historical individual whose lived experiences contribute meaningfully to the broader narrative of national history.

The study further establishes that the novel effectively exposes the intersecting structures of colonial domination and patriarchal authority. Rather than presenting these systems as separate forms of oppression, Misra illustrates how they operate simultaneously to regulate women's identities, political participation, and historical representation. Lakshmibai's struggle is therefore portrayed not only as resistance against British imperialism but also as a challenge to

deeply embedded patriarchal expectations that sought to confine women to narrowly defined social roles. By revealing these interconnected structures of power, *Rani* offers a more comprehensive understanding of women's historical experiences and reinforces the importance of intersectional approaches within feminist and postcolonial literary studies.

Another important finding concerns the novel's reinterpretation of gender and leadership. Drawing upon Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, the study demonstrates that Lakshmibai continually negotiates and reconstructs her identity in response to changing political circumstances. She refuses to conform either to restrictive patriarchal ideals of femininity or to conventional masculine models of political authority. Instead, Misra presents leadership as an inclusive process that integrates courage with compassion, strategic intelligence with emotional maturity, and public responsibility with personal integrity. This multidimensional representation challenges gender binaries that have historically shaped both literary and historical narratives, offering a more nuanced understanding of women's political leadership.

The analysis also highlights the novel's contribution to feminist historiography through its recovery of women's subjectivity and historical agency. By foregrounding Lakshmibai's voice, the narrative contests archival silences and demonstrates that literature can illuminate dimensions of history inaccessible through official documentation alone. The novel does not reject historical evidence; rather, it complements documentary history by reconstructing emotional, psychological, and interpersonal experiences omitted from conventional archives. Consequently, *Rani* functions as a form of counter-history that broadens historical inquiry while simultaneously questioning the assumptions underlying traditional historical knowledge.

A significant contribution of this research lies in its interdisciplinary analytical

framework. By integrating the theoretical perspectives of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Homi K. Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee, the study offers a comprehensive interpretation of *Rani* that moves beyond single-theory approaches. This integrated framework demonstrates how feminist historiography, postcolonial criticism, gender studies, and narrative analysis collectively enrich the understanding of historical fiction. Such an interdisciplinary approach not only provides a deeper reading of Misra's novel but also offers a useful methodological model for future research examining women-centred historical narratives across different literary traditions.

The study also contributes to contemporary scholarship on historical fiction by demonstrating that literary narratives play an essential role in reconstructing historical memory. Rather than viewing fiction as secondary to academic historiography, this research argues that historical novels possess the capacity to question dominant historical assumptions, recover marginalised voices, and generate alternative interpretations of the past. Through imaginative reconstruction, *Rani* restores human complexity to a historical figure whose identity has often been simplified by colonial and nationalist discourses. In doing so, the novel exemplifies the potential of literature to participate actively in the production of historical knowledge rather than merely illustrating established historical facts.

Despite these contributions, the present study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The research focuses exclusively on Jaishree Misra's *Rani* and therefore does not undertake a comparative analysis with other literary representations of Rani Lakshmibai or with historical novels centred on women leaders from different cultural contexts. Such comparisons could provide additional insights into evolving patterns of feminist historical representation. Furthermore, the analysis is primarily qualitative and interpretative, relying on

close textual reading informed by selected theoretical frameworks. While this methodology enables an in-depth exploration of narrative strategies and ideological perspectives, it does not incorporate reader-response studies, reception analysis, or empirical investigations into how contemporary audiences interpret the novel. These limitations do not diminish the significance of the findings but indicate areas where future scholarship can extend the present research.

Future research may therefore pursue several promising directions. Comparative studies examining *Rani* alongside other Indian or international historical novels featuring women protagonists could reveal broader developments in feminist historical fiction across cultures. Researchers may also investigate cinematic, theatrical, or digital adaptations of historical women to explore how different media reconstruct female agency and historical memory. Additional studies could combine feminist historiography with emerging approaches such as memory studies, trauma studies, affect theory, ecocriticism, or digital humanities to generate new perspectives on historical representation. Moreover, interdisciplinary research involving literature, history, sociology, and gender studies may further illuminate the relationship between narrative, collective memory, and national identity. Reader-oriented studies exploring the influence of feminist historical fiction on contemporary understandings of women's history would also make valuable contributions to both literary criticism and educational research.

In conclusion, Jaishree Misra's *Rani* stands as a compelling example of how historical fiction can challenge established historiographical traditions and reconstruct the past through feminist imagination. By recovering women's voices, interrogating colonial and patriarchal narratives, and presenting Rani Lakshmibai as a complex historical subject rather than a symbolic icon, the novel broadens the possibilities of both historical fiction and feminist literary scholarship. The findings of this study affirm that historical memory is not a fixed or immutable record but

an evolving process continually reshaped through critical interpretation and inclusive representation. Ultimately, *Rani* demonstrates that rewriting history is not an act of replacing the past but of enriching it by restoring those voices that have long remained unheard. In giving narrative authority to a woman whose life has profoundly shaped India's historical consciousness, Misra not only reimagines the story of Rani Lakshmibai but also advances a

more equitable, pluralistic, and human-centred understanding of history itself. The novel therefore occupies a significant place within contemporary feminist historical fiction and offers an enduring reminder that a nation's history achieves completeness only when the experiences, perspectives, and agency of women are recognised as integral to its collective memory.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of the findings reported in this study.

Data Availability

This study is based on qualitative textual analysis of published literary works and secondary scholarly sources. All primary and secondary materials analysed during the course of this research are publicly available through published books, peer-reviewed journals, and academic databases. No proprietary datasets were generated or analysed during this study.

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