



# **The Last Queen : Unveiling strength and spirit of Maharani Jindan Kaur**

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## **Abstract**

It has been evident since the time immemorial that women have always been considered inferior to men in society. There were various reasons responsible for this kind of biased mindset. They were expected to carry out only household responsibility and remain subservient to men. They were given limited rights. The belief that women are inferior to men has deep historical, cultural, and social roots. Women being grown up with the patriarchal mindset around, they accepted that they are subjected to accept subordinate roles. But there are so many historical events that prove that women have always proved themselves as strong as men and equally compatible in all respects. But it is very unfortunate that there are so many unsung heroines in history who fought so bravely against all the odds, and there is still no mention of them in history. They have died an unknown death in spite of having done the most encouraging deeds. History has so many narratives of various heroes and warriors whose extraordinary deeds in the form of their freedom struggle, valour, dedication and sacrifice have always been eulogized across length and breadth all over the world. But the exceptional courage of so many women have achieved no prominence in history. Maharani Jindan Kaur, the last queen of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab is one such incredible woman who has remained unsung and unknown among people. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni had expressed her disappointment in one of her interviews and brought forward the unsung story about Maharani Jindan in her novel **The Last Queen**.

## Key words

Patriarchal, compatible, subservient, political intrigues, regent

## 1 .Introduction

"Last queen" by a contemporary writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a historical novel stating the story of an ordinary girl, born in a poor family and a daughter of a kennel keeper who due to her fascinating personality traits attracts Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, the emperor of Punjab and becomes his last queen.

After her husband's death, Jindan becomes the regent of her son Duleep Singh and her journey as regent was inundated with extreme struggle, mental anguish, challenges, threats and political intrigues in her own state as well as from Britishers. The novel presents the rich Punjabi culture, the magnificence of Sikh Court and the downfall of the Sikh empire.

The novel also delves into the political conspiracy, struggle for power , turmoil that hits the Sikh empire and the rise of Jindan as a persistent and powerful figure who fought against the dominance of British rulers. The novel exhibits the extraordinary determination, strong will power and never say die spirit of Jindan Kaur that makes her a very motivating and praiseworthy character of history. The most turbulent period of Indian history and the exceptional life journey of a remarkable woman who overpowered all the hurdles and became the icon of resistance and strength was brought to life by the rich story telling technique adopted by Divakaruni.

The present research paper aims to throw light on how Queen Jindan contributed to substantiate her influence and legacy. This will help in gaining the broader understanding of the period in which she ruled and its socio - political culture. The paper also aspires to gain a deeper understanding of the life journey of Jindan as a wife mother, queen and a leader from the feminist perspective. This can lead to discussion on how female leaders stood out to be very influential in the patriarchal norms of the society that undervalued the role of female leaders in history who with their astute political strategies, governance and the challenges could overcome the extremities they faced. The research paper also focuses on how Jindan's character can inspire a lot of contemporary women by showcasing the remarkable resilience and leadership qualities depicted by her.

## 2. Methodology

**Literary Analysis :** Close reading of "The Last Queen" to identify themes, symbols, and character development related to Maharani Jindan Kaur.

### **Historical Research:**

Examination of historical records, biographies, and academic articles about Maharani Jindan Kaur to provide context and comparison.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Identify and discuss major themes such as resilience, leadership, and cultural significance.

## **3. Discussion**

### **Early and Later Life of Jindan Kaur**

Maharani Jind Kaur, commonly known as Rani Jindan was a significant figure in the history of the Sikh Empire after her husband Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's death.

Jind Kaur was born in 1817 in Chachar, a small village in Gujranwala district, which is now in Pakistan. She was the daughter of Manna Singh Aulakh, the overseer of the royal kennels, and his wife, Sada Kaur. Jind Kaur got married to Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1835, at the age of 18. She was the last queen of Maharaja among his several wives. She was the most adorable queen of Maharaja due to her beauty, grace and wisdom . After Maharaja Ranjit Singh's untimely death, his and Jindan's son Duleep Singh who was simply 5 years old became the successor of the Sikh Empire.

Due to his young age, Jind Kaur became the regent and effectively became the de facto ruler of the empire. With the help of her exceptional political acumen and remarkable resilience she tried to stabilize the Sikh Empire and resist British influence in Punjab.

- She reorganized the army, managed state affairs, and attempted to strengthen the Sikh state's position. But during her regency period the Sikh empire faced a lot of political turmoil and encroachment from Britishers. The First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846) led to significant territorial loss and the power of Sikh Empire declined to a great extent. Despite her efforts, the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-1849) resulted in the annexation of the Sikh Empire by the British.

After the British annexation, Jind Kaur was separated from her son and exiled to various locations within India. In the initial period, she was imprisoned in the Chunar Fort and later moved to Benares (Varanasi) and then to Nepal.

In 1861, after nearly 13 years of separation, Jind Kaur was reunited with her son in England. Duleep Singh, who had been converted to Christianity and lived as a British aristocrat, arranged for her to live with him but was so much inclined towards Christianity that he could not get connected with his roots.

### **Jindan Kaur, a multifaceted personality.**

Jindan was an epitome of intelligence, extreme tenacity, strength, unwavering determination, affection, foresight and so on. Despite her humble beginnings, Jindan Kaur becomes the beloved wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh due to her intelligence and beauty. After his death, she navigates the outrageous political landscape to protect her son, Duleep Singh, and the Sikh Empire. Her strength and determination is witnessed from the fact that she assumes the role of regent, makes important and crucial decisions to safeguard the kingdom. Her statement in the novel “ I was not born a queen, but I would not let that stop me from ruling like one.” is an instance of her strong will power and belief in herself.

Jindan Kaur demonstrates sharp political insight and strategic thinking and her belief in the womanly might through her statement "In a world dominated by men, I would show them that a woman, too, could wield.”

When the British start encroaching on Punjab, she understands the gravity of the threat and works tirelessly to fortify the empire's defenses. Her negotiations and diplomatic efforts highlight her intelligence and foresight too.

Jindan exhibits extreme affection and selfless love for her son, Duleep Singh and it is a driving force in her life. She endures imprisonment and exile to protect him and his rightful place as Maharaja. She possesses deep concern for her people as well. Her sacrifices speak about her deep maternal bond and selflessness through her statement "Everything I did, every sacrifice I made, was for my son and the future of our people.”

As quoted by Jindan, "They may imprison my body, but they cannot shackle my spirit”, she depicts her indomitable courage and defiance. Jindan Kaur refuses to bow down even during the time of British oppression and personal hardship. Her defiant spirit is also evident when she openly challenges the British authorities, symbolizing her resistance and courage.

Jindan’s statement "In my heart, I carry the Punjab, with its golden fields and its proud people." speaks about how she was deeply rooted with her cultural heritage and the state of Punjab. There are multiple instances like, her attachment with her people, her memories of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and her longing for her homeland dazzle her personality& make her a relatable and deeply humane figure. Jindan Kaur's characterization in "The Last Queen" is a testament to her enduring legacy as a powerful and inspirational figure. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has crafted her story with empathy and depth, highlighting her impact she had on history.



## **Reflection of Theme of Dynamic Leadership by a Female Character in "The Last Queen" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**

In "The Last Queen" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni showcases the theme of dynamic leadership through the portrayal of Maharani Jindan Kaur, the last queen of Punjab. Her journey of life from a humble & young girl of an inferior origins to a powerful and influential leader incorporates the essence of dynamic leadership, marked by resilience, intelligence, and unstoppable determination.

### **Emergence of Leadership:**

Despite being brought up in a very low background family, Jindan Kaur rises to power which is certainly a testament to her inherent leadership qualities.

She wins the attention and love of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh due to her intelligence, courage and beauty and marries him which further leads her to the political arena where she proves herself as a woman of extraordinary mettle..

### **Strategic Acumen**

Following her husband's death, Jindan Kaur displays remarkable strategic acumen. In the role of a regent for her son, she navigates the dangerous political landscape of the Sikh Empire, that was full of internal rivalries and external threats from the British East India Company. Her ability to make strong decisions and forge alliances depicts her dynamic leadership.

### **Courage and Resilience**

Jindan Kaur proves herself an epitome of unyielding courage and resilience. Though she faced a lot of betrayal in her own empire and imprisonment, she never got drifted from her mission of protecting her son's throne and preserving the sovereignty of Punjab. Her escape from captivity and subsequent efforts to seek justice and reclaim her position exhibit her indomitable spirit.

### **Empowerment and Advocacy**

Jindan Kaur's leadership is not limited to political maneuvering. She always remained committed towards advocacy for her people's rights and well-being. Her efforts to rally the Sikh community and inspire resistance against British

colonization reflect her commitment to empowerment and justice. Her speeches and actions gained her popularity, respect and admiration.

### **Legacy of Leadership:**

The legacy of Jindan Kaur's dynamic leadership endures beyond her lifetime. Her story serves as an inspiration for future generations, particularly women, demonstrating that leadership transcends gender and societal constraints. Her contributions to Punjab's history and her fight against colonial oppression remain a testament to her enduring impact.

## **4. Conclusion**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni picturises a vivid portrait of Maharani Jindan Kaur, whose dynamic leadership in the times of all the catastrophic situations sets an example of strength, intelligence, and resilience, strategic acumen, courage, and unwavering commitment to her people. Jindan Kaur symbolizes herself as a powerful female leader and leaves an indelible mark on history.

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