

## Persistence of a Stalwart Personality: A Humanistic Approach to the *Last Queen* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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### Abstract

Persistence is a quality that allows someone to continue doing something during predicament. It motivates to try harder during the challenging situation. People with this particular quality are full of vitality and determined to face the challenges to achieve a long term goal. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni weaves a story of a century old Indian history in her latest book the *Last Queen*. She presents the characters with more real and human than any other textbooks. The behavior of each individual is fundamentally oriented towards self-actualization, whereas it enables the individuals to perform at their full potential. According to Rogers, the positive values imbibed in the matured person is being real in expressing one's feelings honestly and making choices with pride and confidence. The character discussed in this article, trusts her ability to deal with the world and shows high degree of spontaneity, compassion and self-direction. The objective of this paper is to discuss the persistence of a stalwart personality through humanistic approach in the novel *the Last Queen*

**Keywords:** Persistence, self-actualization, confidence, trusts, compassion, self-direction.

### Aims of the Research:

- Describing Maharani Jindan Kaur as a fully functioning person through her persistence and growth mindset
- Emphasizing Jindan's personality as a self-actualized person, who regulates her emotions in a more confident way
- Understanding her potential and her own ability by expressing her feelings honestly

### Introduction

Chitra Banerjee is one of the most remarkable writers of the Indian Diaspora. She has carved a niche for herself in the literary horizon that looked into the eyes of her characters to evaluate the struggles and values of human relationship in the phase of adversity. Divakaruni is an Indian American author and poet, has two collections of short stories and thirteen novels to her credit. She depicts the trials and tribulations faced by the women

during different stages of their life realistically. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's latest novel '*the Last Queen*' brings vivacious one of the most fearless woman of the nineteenth century. The novel is the journey of the royal kennel keeper's daughter becoming the youngest queen of Punjab. The novel follows the first person narrative, letting readers learn the peak and fall of the empire through the protagonist's eyes and emotions. The author had managed to bring out Maharani Jindan Kaur's emotion, courage, resistance, passion and pain. Divakaruni's the *Last Queen* gives Jindan Kaur a sense of agency- for the most part she is the master of making choices and decisions in her life more confidently. She was a great rebel queen who fought against the British bravely. The greatest victory of the novel *the Last Queen* leaves the readers eager to know more about the real life of this royal kingdom. In terms of psychological perception, the uniqueness of an individual is studied as a whole person that which determines their own behaviors and goals.

Rogers describes the personality that factors healthy development who lives up to their potential. He argues that personality development naturally moves towards healthy growth.

An Individual with the quality of persistence has a goal or vision in mind that motivates them with efficiency and confidence. This quality of the personality becomes the focal point of their life to achieve success. Persistent people have inner energy and great emotion to keep them motivated through tough times. They have the ability to adapt to the situation that increases their chances of success. Persistent people try to achieve things they desire in life. *The Last Queen* is the novel of fierce Sikh queen of Lahore, the capital of the Punjab Empire. Maharani Jindan Kaur had strong personality and Indomitable will. She has come across hurling of insults, jealousies, violence and hatred.

Jindan's childhood was spent in a village hut on a muddy edge of Gujranwala. Unlike other girls, her mother allowed her to study and she was a great student. Right from her childhood she believed to be stronger than her brother Jawahar. "I'm stronger, so I fetch water and firewood" (17). She was not only physically strong but also mentally. After an abrupt end of an education, her father Manna Singh Aulakh takes Jindan and her older brother to Lahore. Her father works and lives in Badshahi Quila as a royal kennel keeper. Once she travelled along with her father to Lahore, Jindan unexpectedly meets the charismatic Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She was renowned for her beauty, virtue and strength. Maharaja married her in 1835 by sending his 'sword' to the village. Jindan understands the situation that she has to be married to the Sarkar's sword as this is the reality of the life of a queen. She emphasized on self-growth and personal development to show herself as an eligible queen. Sarkar acknowledges that, he was impressed by Jindan's curiosity and intelligence. "I'm impressed by your curiosity and Intelligence. None of my other queens care about what goes on outside quila". (104)

The story starts with describing Jindan's sleepless nights waiting by the sickbed of Maharaja Ranjit Singh along with his other

wives. When Dhian Singh announced that the queens must return to the Zenana quarters, Jindan gathers her courage and protests that she wants to be near the Sarkar as she imagines her husband's hand reaching for her. 'Let the others go; I need to remain. I won't be in anyone's way'. 'I have to be here when my Sarkar calls for me, as he surely will.'(4).

Jindan was not afraid to share her views regardless of what others think about her. She follows her heart and believes in her abilities. She was determined to make things happen. She had a strong hope that Sarkar; a perceptive man will recover from his sickbed. Jindan believed that if she begs the saint Jhingar Shah for his blessings all night, the Sarkar would become better from his illness. When her son Dalip had a bloody flux, she fasted and prayed for twenty- four hours. The next morning to her surprise, her son opened his eyes and smiled at her. This made her to believe in her own instincts. Being a pertinacious woman, she knots her thick braid to the bars of window all night praying for the recovery of her husband. Unfortunately, Maharaja Ranjith Singh succumbed to death due to his illness.

After the death of Maharaja, everything has been changed for Rani Jindan. She can no longer enjoy the liberties she used to; instead she was viewed more as a threat. Rani Guddan tells the reality to Jindan about the difficulty of being a royal widow. The tragic end of the royal widows of Maharani Chand Kaur and her daughter-in-law Bibi met a violent end after their husbands passed away. But, Rani Jindan prepared to be mentally a strong person after the demise of her husband Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Life has become more challenge for Jindan, as she has to take care of a year old son Dalip and protect herself in a treacherous world.

Jindan's self-actualization needs are met when she motivated herself through self-development and personal growth. She developed her skills to secure the Sikh dynasty, as she accepted Sarkar's love to be his land Punjab than herself. Jindan acquire self-awareness by understanding her potential and strength in her life. She learns that Sarkar's closest confidant and ambassador was Fakir Azizuddin. She makes him as her trusted guide. For over two years Fakir sends her books, maps,

history of Punjab, information on court intrigues and the growing threat of British.

Fakir realizes Jindan's strength and ability by confessing to her that she is the woman, Sarkar has been searching for all his life. Though Sarkar has been married several times, he was always disappointed with his other wives. Fakir believes Jindan as smart, loyal, honest and a good listener, who will love Punjab as fiercely as Sarkar. He has been her advisor and a fatherly figure as he shapes her mind relating to discipline and educating her son Dalip. Fakir has been guiding the queen in her thought process and decision making in her life even after the death of the Maharaja.

Life wasn't always easy for Jindan particularly after the demise of Sarkar. It made her survival more challenging with gloomy outlook. The unrelenting stress that caused by negative thinking affected her mentally and emotionally which made her feel sad, afraid and hopeless. Jindan derives strength when her husband's voice pulled within her and realized she had a purpose of living for the sake of her only son. " ..Sarkar's voice pulls at me. You must be both father and mother to our son. Didn't you promise me that? (169). She holds her son concernedly and assures that she will protect him until her last drop of blood. The British entered into the Lahore Kingdom in 1846 which made them the virtual masters of the Punjab. Maharani Jindan escaped to Kangra Hills with the help of Dhian Singh in order to protect herself and her son. Her only priority was to safeguard prince Dalip, which made her leave everything including the Haveli, the most precious gift given to her by Sarkar. The Lahore saw several kings and battles after the death of Sarkar. As all of the king's heirs were dead, the fate pushes prince Dalip to the throne. Maharani Jindan becomes queen regent until her son reaches adulthood.

In her new role, Jindan fights hard against the British as well as her own treacherous courtiers, politics, plots, tricks, spying and endless battles to power, that mark royal life. Fakir cautions Jindan not to grow too confident as she has to play many levels of royal game. He also says that, she is not only a wife and mother, but a queen as well. The reputation she had earned all these years as Sarkar's

faithful widow made her to protect her image and the fate of Punjab. She cannot ruin her image in spite of seeking love and unconsciously attracted to Lal Singh, a courtier. Being a strong and fearless woman she claims full responsibility on her mistakes and decisions.

Maharani Jindan became a symbol of national dignity. She had self- directed thinking which was a major component of intelligence dealing with the knowledge and awareness. She urged the freedom fighters to continue the struggle dauntlessly in the land of Punjab. She had her trusted band of servants and continued to send letters and messages to the chief of the rebellion. It is her aspect of perseverance to work hard, gaining new knowledge, retaining information and recalling it when it matters. Numerous vexatious problems confronted the queen. She applied herself the solution to those problems and secured the assistance from the council of elder statesmen and military generals. Maharani held the court, transacted state business in public and addressed the troops. Above all, she put up a brave fight against the colonialists. The British tried to impose restrictions on her movements. They described Jindan as a serious obstacle to British rule in India. The British wanted to get rid of her and employed a smear campaign to discredit the queen's image as the "Messalina of the Punjab". Jindan's emotional response wasn't always public. She never bothered about the defamation of her character but positively handled the situation because her only intention was to shield the land of Punjab from the hands of colonialists. She continued her fight with courage and stubbornness against the British.

Jindan was separated from both her son Dalip and loyal maid Mangala. She was imprisoned in Sheikhpura Zila and then banished to Chunur fort in Banaras. She remained under strict surveillance of British control. Jindan was estranged from her son for a period of fourteen years. All through the years she felt tremendous amount of pain and feelings of profound vulnerability. It was her ability to stay strong in the face of emotional hardship. Jindan may be crushed by abrupt changes happened in her life but, her dexterity to bounce back from challenges made her more resilient.

However, Jindan escaped to Nepal disguised as a maid servant and undertakes a dangerous journey all by herself to Kathmandu. She was mentally prepared to cross the treacherous mountain terrain and proved herself to be a fearless woman to take up the risk in life. "I refuse to remain the firangs' prisoner any longer. I do not care if I die in the attempt (282). She had the grit that was associated with her resilience, endurance, patience and stamina. Her arrival to Nepal was both unexpected and unwelcome. The Nepal Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur granted her asylum, as a mark of respect to the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was widely believed that when Jindan was in Kathmandu, she was engaged in political intrigue to secure the revival of Sikh dynasty in the Punjab.

Towards the end of 1860, it was signified to Maharani that her son Dalip Singh was about to return to India. She was reunited with her son once again after being estranged from him for a period of fourteen years. Jindan travelled to Calcutta hopefully and decided to spend her last days together with her son. She wished her ashes to be scattered in the holiest river Ganga, and half placed next to her Sarkar's Samadhi. Finally, the British Government's decree said that the mother and son can be together only if they travel to England. She accepts to go to England all because her love for him was greater than her hatred for the British. She determines to grow strong once she reaches England as she was left with limited amount of time to do many things.

She believed that she had made the right decision for the sake of her son. "My love for you is greater than my hatred for the British" (Divakaruni, 2022:305) Jindan may be a fierce ruler of Indian sub-continent, but she was a compassionate mother and an advisor. She reminded her son Dalip of his heritage and firmly advised him to be more prudent. She recalls telling him that Sarkar never believed in living beyond his means. She recounts to him how frugally she had managed her household after she became a widow, to ensure that she wouldn't be beholden to anyone. Jindan sows positive and courageous message to her son. Until her last breath, she wished her son chant the victory cry that has kept her people resilient

through centuries of persecution. Maharani Jind Kaur died in the year 1863 at Kensington, England.

### **Conclusion**

It was an excellent love story of a King and a commoner, loyalty and betrayal and an imperishable bond of love between mother and child. The persistence of Jindan was characterized by her determination despite her obstacles and barriers she had encountered. She improved her competency to think critically. In the male dominated society, Jindan defied tradition, cast aside the veil and fought against the British so bravely. She was never afraid to trust her gut and worked things through her mind. It was not her smart thinking or leadership potential that made her strong during obstacle situations. Instead, it was her persistence that made the difference and self-confidence gave her the will power to endure predicament. As a self-directed person, Jindan initiated learning, formulating goals, implementing strategies and ventured to make series of decisions. Nevertheless, Jindan's courageous behavior exhibited an aura of fearlessness and invincibility. The queen pursued for progress, not for perfection. This fearless woman was the last one to stand against the British. She never bothered about the end result. Her intention was to eradicate the foot of British from the Punjab soil. Such a brave woman of nineteenth century was intensely disliked and also feared by the British. Her persistence allowed trying the hardest part of her life more diligently and confidently.

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