



Rebel Queen

Michelle Moran

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From the internationally bestselling author of *Nefertiti* and *Cleopatra's Daughter* comes the breathtaking story of Queen Lakshmi—India's Joan of Arc—who against all odds defied the mighty British invasion to defend her beloved kingdom.

When the British Empire sets its sights on India in the mid-nineteenth century, it expects a quick and easy conquest. India is fractured and divided into kingdoms, each independent and wary of one another, seemingly no match for the might of the English. But when they arrive in the Kingdom of Jhansi, the British army is met with a surprising challenge.

Instead of surrendering, Queen Lakshmi raises two armies—one male and one female—and rides into battle, determined to protect her country and her people. Although her soldiers may not appear at first to be formidable against superior British weaponry and training, Lakshmi refuses to back down from the empire determined to take away the land she loves.

Told from the unexpected perspective of Sita—Queen Lakshmi's most favored companion and most trusted soldier in the all-female army—*Rebel Queen* shines a light on a time and place rarely explored in historical fiction. In the tradition of her bestselling novel, *Nefertiti*, and through her strong, independent heroines fighting to make their way in a male dominated world, Michelle Moran brings nineteenth-century India to rich, vibrant life.

Rebel Queen Details

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From Reader Review Rebel Queen for online ebook

Stephanie Thornton says

India's Sepoy Rebellion is a critical turning point in both Indian and British history, but this is the first time I've seen the event fictionalized, so I was thrilled to see Michelle Moran hit Queen Lakshmi's story out of the park. (So much so, in fact, that I plan to recommend this as an extra credit book for my students!)

What I've read about 19th century India has been mostly confined to textbooks, so it was a treat to experience life in the rani's Panch Mahal through the eyes of Sita, one of Queen Lakshmi's female guards. Sita's story has a little bit of everything: romance, betrayal, ambition, and a twist at the end that's simply heartrending. India truly comes to life with its fragrant spices and colorful festivals, celebrations and unique culture that Moran has painstakingly recreated.

I've been an avid fan of Moran's novels about history's forgotten women since Nefertiti hit the shelves, but *Rebel Queen* is now my favorite of her books. Highly recommended!

The Just-About-Cocky Ms M says

I didn't think this book deserved a review--it wasn't as truly awful as *Madame Tussaud* or the utter travesty that was *The Second Empress*, which I did review and at excruciating length. This book was simply blah, and as another discerning reviewer cleverly noted, read like an anxious high school senior's last-minute historical essay due the next morning before lunch. I read the first fifty or so pages, and then began skimming until the ridiculously rushed train wreck of a conclusion.

Folks, I have read more exciting Wikipedia entries--and the research apparent in this book shows less depth than the average Wiki article. While it is true there is plenty of descriptions, most of them are wasted on secondary and tertiary characters and locales and customs perhaps interesting to know about in a trivial way, but they do little to anchor the characters to their world in Jhansi or move the plot along at more than a dreamy snail's pace.

We don't get a rich, complex tale of Rani Lakshmi and the increasingly tight hold the British were placing around the Indian kingdoms. We don't get much sense of anything beyond the palace walls. We have little idea of the coming "revolt" until the end of the book when the alleged "Rebel Queen" finally spring into action. What we get instead is a leisurely, superficial stroll through life with Sita, supposedly a strong female warrior and Lakshmi's confidante, but who acts more like a victim from first to last.

So very many folks loved this book, as they obviously adore everything from this author. That's fine. But I believe I can voice my opinion, even if it is quite contrary, without too much risk. And I believe this is, for me, a typical book by this author--largely superficial and definitely History Lite.

Ashley *Hufflepuff Kitten* says

4.5 stars

I really enjoy Michelle Moran's books -- so far the only one I haven't read is *The Second Empress*. I was extremely intrigued by this one because I know next to nothing about India's history (besides the fact that it was colonized by Britain), and I love it when historical fiction can teach you something while it simultaneously tells a great story. Sita was a great MC, and everyone else seemed to be fleshed out very well-- her family and neighbors, the other women of the Durga Dal, the rani, the raja. REALLY good book, and I'm amazed it only took me two days to read it!

Now I want Stephanie Thornton's *Tiger Queens*.

Bookaholic (reads every mortal thing) says

I'm curious but Non-Indians (and even some Indians) always somehow manage to monumentally fuck up Indian mythology and history (and I always know, considering I took 4 years of Indian history)

I'm scared.

Olivia B. says

I am so very excited for this book. Michelle Moran is by far my favorite author. Her detail and choice of words flow beautifully and put together wonderful stories.

Adite says

This is the second historical fiction book I have read which is about Indian history but written by a non-Indian. It also is about a one of a kind historical personality--Rani Lakshmibai--who is unfortunately not much talked about outside of India. So when I came across Michelle Moran's book I simply had to read it. So, did I like it? Yes, but much as I wanted to, I didn't love it. My rating would be 3.5 stars. Kudos to the author for doing her homework/research really well. She has a total grasp on concepts such as sati, the caste system and the complicated Indian milieu of the 1850s, which would challenge most non-Indians. But Michelle does it with a surprising compassion and understanding.

But--and this is a big 'but'--the problem with the book (in my opinion) is that Rani Lakshmibai is only a secondary character in the book. If it were a movie it could be called a 'guest appearance'. The blurb gives you the impression that this is the Queen's story. But actually, the Queen really comes into her own in the last 25% of the book. Sita is the real protagonist of the story, who is a member of the Queen's elite all-female army. For three quarters of the book, the story revolves around how this young woman from a modest background in a remote village makes it to the inner circle of the Queen's court, some amount of court politics, a budding romance with a guardsman. The book really explodes into action in the last quarter--and tries to justify the premise of the story as per its back cover blurb--and that's where it really comes into its own. Moran's writing is visceral and the human drama of a queen leading her ragtag bunch of soldiers against a powerful foreign army is heart wrenching.

Surprisingly enough, even though the author devotes such a large number of pages to Sita's relationship with her own family (and her sister Anuja) the dramatic moment when the two sisters meet after a catastrophic

event that occurs is kind of flat and one-dimensional. I also had an issue with one of the dramatic scenes--where Anuja turns to her husband for help, screaming his name--as implausible. (In 1850s India, no woman would speak her husband's name no matter how horrid the situation. Moreover, given women's lowly status in the family they had no rights to challenge men's decisions). I guess the problem was that in the overall tragedy of the story, the smaller tragedy of Sita's family was lost (specially as all the dramatic events happen in quick succession leading to the finale).

Even so, the book makes for a compelling read and is a great contribution to the pathetically inadequate body of work on Indian history. Going by the large number of reviews the book has garnered, it does show that there are enough readers who are curious about other countries and their histories. Though it does make me wonder if Western readers would respond with such enthusiasm if the book were to be penned by an Indian rather than a Westerner. For those of you who are interested in this period in Indian history, I would highly recommend "In the City of Gold and Silver: The story of Begum Hazrat Mahal" by Kenize Mourad.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

4.5 stars. This is one of those books that I feel like I have been anxiously awaiting for a very long time (according to Goodreads, it looks like maybe I added it to my TBR way back in 2013! The book is just coming out now so it has been a long (but very worthwhile) wait. I haven't read nearly enough of Moran's books (I must fix this!) but this book is definitely in the vein of some of the things that I loved about her other books between a memorable story, great characters, and rich historical detail.

In "Rebel Queen," we meet the last queen of India, Queen Lakshmi. I did not know much about her at all before reading this book but was very drawn to the character for her strength and her part in the history of India. We get to know Queen Lakshmi through one of her confidantes and her female guards, Sita. Queen Lakshmi is obviously the marquee character here but Sita is fascinating in her own right. I really loved this character! Through a lot of hard work, she makes her way into the elite guard forces (a process which I loved reading about). She is committed to her family and works very hard to provide a dowry for her beloved younger sister. Moran creates a really well-rounded, real feeling main character that I loved to follow.

The historical detail in this book is a treat! I love reading about India but I feel like a lot of the fiction that I have read that is set there is mostly set in the 20th century so Sita's world was brand new to me. Moran paints a rich picture of court life and the struggles between the Indians and the Brits. All the detail made the story feel incredibly rich and pulled me in right from the start! Overall, this is a great story that historical fiction lovers will eat right up!

Marcela (BookaholicCat) says

4 ½ Stars

For years I heard great things about Michelle Moran's books, but for one reason or another I didn't read any of them... until September last year... when finally, thanks to Thor, Loki and Batman I picked up Nefertiti... And OMG! It was amazing! Historical fiction at its best. I loved it so much I read The Heretic Queen right afterwards and OMG! I loved it too! What else to do than to read Cleopatra's Daughter next... and OMG! Moran can't do wrong... I loved it too! By then I knew I was addicted to her books and what else I could do than to read Madame Tussaud: A Novel of the French Revolution, the only problem was I knew there was

only one book left to read and then I had to wait until March 2015 to the release of Rebel Queen. I tried to postpone reading The Second Empress: A Novel of Napoleon's Court, but I couldn't. My intentions only lasted couple of days until I "had to" read it. My addiction to her books was out of hand, I knew it, but there was nothing I could do. I tried reading historical fiction by other authors but it was not the same, none compared to Moran's books. I craved them. To say I was dying to get my hands on an early copy of Rebel Queen is the understatement of the year... Luckily I received that longed copy... I wanted to read it immediately, but at the same time I didn't want to read it, because what I was going to do next? I was also afraid because lately I'm preferring audiobooks to books, but I shouldn't have... After the first page – yes, only one page - I was completely invested in the story... Michelle Moran is that good.

Rebel Queen is set in the XIX century in India during the British invasion and it's the story of Queen Lakshmi of Jhansi, who is historically known as the Rebel Queen. The story is told from Sita Bhosale's point of view.

Read the rest of my review at [The Bookaholic Cat](#)

Sonja Arlow says

Any fan of historical fiction has their favourite time period or culture and for me it has always been World War 2 and the mid to late 19th century. I have never really been drawn to Indian history so it was with some reluctance I started this book. But I was pleasantly surprised once I started reading.

Boys are prized much higher than girls and more often than not little girls just "disappear" directly after being born. The ones that do survive this are married at the age of 10. If a wife's husband dies it's considered the honourable thing for a widow to commit Sati by walking into the funeral pyre of her late husband, but really it's just to get rid of another unwanted woman.

The mid-19th century was also the time when the British were slowly chipping away at the various kingdoms within India with the view to dominate all of them.

Against this backdrop the story of Queen Lakshmi unfolds.

As the story is told from the perspective of one of the elite female guards to the Queen, we don't actually get to know the Queen as intimately as the book blurb alludes to but we do get an in-depth feel of this time period of India, the caste system and specifically Indian culture and traditions as it relates to women.

The rivalry between the women of the Durgavasi (female guards) reminded me of the women in the harem in Esther. There is the same back stabbing, jealousy and greed but with more weapons and less sex :-)

This was an easy read that is not recommended if you want a more rigorous account of this piece of history. If you normally shy away from historical fiction because you worry that it will be too boring or heavy then this is for you.

I am looking forward to the release of this author's a book about Mata Hari later this year.

Asha says

My first Moran book was Nefertiti and I liked it so much that I told myself I'd read more of her works. I learned so much from this book, which is what I usually expect after reading a historical fiction book but may not always happen. This novel introduced me to something called the Durga Dal, which is the name for the queen of India's (*rani*) elite all-female personal guard. I was absolutely floored by this. I hope to learn more about it through other books and articles. As for the actual plot, the narrator is Sita, a woman who is part of the Durga Dal, and she serves as the reader's eyes and ears and, what's more, heart. Through her my own frustration and even intense dislike of the British as they unfairly took over India and used the *ranito* suit their own purposes when it was convenient for them grew. I doubt anyone who reads this book will come to the end and still maintain an intense fondness for the British monarchy. What I most enjoyed, however, was how the book is full of multidimensional characters, multidimensional women in a place of high position, not saying, "Look at me, I am a strong female figure," but rather simply saying, "I am."

Caroline says

"Rebel Queen" tells the story of Rani Lakshmibai, an Indian queen famous for her rebellion against the British regime. That's a fairly straightforward summary--except for the fact that Lakshmi's story is told through the eyes of Sita, one of her elite female bodyguards. (Note: I didn't know about the existence of these women-soldiers, the Durgavasi, until reading this book. Another note: they are amazingly cool.)

This is a difficult book to review. Although I knew of Lakshmibai for years before picking up "Rebel Queen" and have always been interested in Indian history, I know few solid facts about her and her era. Thus, I can't speak to the accuracy of the novel. (I'm not even sure if Sita Bhosale existed by that name, or if Moran made an amalgamation of the Durgavasi women and slapped that name on her. In the historical note at the book's name, she mentions one of the women by name as a real historical figure, so I'm assuming Sita existed as well.) I also hesitate to speak much on its cultural accuracy because frankly, it's a white woman's telling of Indian history from an Indian woman's perspective. Moran is married to an Indian man--and has a couple children with him; from what I can tell on her blog she seems set on them being in touch with that side of their heritage and kudos there, girl--and did a lot of research for this book in India. I tend to think that she probably knows more about the Indian culture than most white American women; but she's still a white American woman and you have to take this all with a grain of salt. Mistakes can be made when you're writing about a culture so unlike your own.

All of that being said, I really liked "Rebel Queen". But you should know: this is not Rani Lakshmibai's story. I have to admit, I'm not often fond of "stories about famous women told from the perspective of their less significant friends" subgenre of historical fiction. I just don't see the point. And I will say this--as much as I enjoyed "Rebel Queen", I think it would have been even better if we'd read it from the rani's perspective. Still, the world of the Durgavasi is fascinating, and Sita is a compelling character with an interesting backstory. In truth, the rani is little more than a supporting character. I didn't feel like I knew her at all by the book's end. But I did know Sita and her world of women.

That's the core of the book: the relationships between women. (I wasn't such a fan of the intense, almost unprovoked rivalry between Sita and her fellow guard, Kahini, but it made sense by the end.) The Durgavasi

are more than the rani's guards. They are her confidants and friends, her entertainers and consultants. And of course, with limited contact with men, they come to rely upon each other a great deal. This I found more compelling than the rebellion, which seemed rather rushed and shoved into the background. We're told of the destruction the rebellion brings, but don't get to see it up close very much.

What we do see is the devoted and heartbreaking relationship between Sita and her younger sister Anuja. This is the backbone of the novel. Sita enters the rani's service to support Anu; her world virtually revolves around the girl until she leaves home, and becomes torn between her loyalty to the rani and her loyalty to her family and Anu. Frankly, I feel like this could have been stretched even further, it was so interesting.

Perhaps--partially--because of this, Sita's love interest is forgettable. The romance in "Rebel Queen" is minor and completely unnecessary. It felt inserted into the story out of obligation, and even if it is a part of the real? Sita's story, I felt it could have been included in an author's note rather than the actual plot. I just didn't care about that at all.

For all its flaws, "Rebel Queen" is worth the read. I feel like it's important to support books with a strong emphasis on female relationships, and though it could have taken that element further, this is one of those books. Again, I can't say much about the cultural/historical accuracy of the novel. But I appreciate Moran's efforts to bring an often-overlooked tragedy--that of the British atrocities against India--to the forefront of historical fiction.

Olivermagnus says

Queen Lakshmi of Jhansi is a hero in India but little is known of her in most of the rest of the world. In Rebel Queen, her story of resistance to the English takeover of her kingdom is told from the viewpoint of Sita, a member of Lakshmi's elite female guards, the Dhurga Dal. We begin with an introduction to Sita as a young girl. She, like other women in her caste, live in purdah and cannot be seen by any man outside her own family. Her family doesn't have any money for her dowry so she and her father decide to have her train her to become a Durgavasi. There is a competition to get into the Durga Dal when one of the Durgavasi retires. It is years before there is an opening but Sita eventually wins a chance to compete.

In 1857 the British Empire decides to annex Jhansi and doesn't expect any challenge to its powerful army. Because India is divided into independent kingdoms, each with their own individuals armies, the British are surprised to get to Jhansi and discover that Queen Lakshmi is riding at the head of her army, determined to protect her people.

I felt immersed in the place, the time and the Indian culture. This was a story of family, love, and betrayal, and Sita was the perfect narrator. Some of the atrocities committed by both sides will disturb you, but the novel provides a context that histories sometimes lack. This was an amazing story, and a piece of history I was completely unaware of. I have to say I am not disappointed in this novel at all, and look forward to Michelle Moran's new novel, Mata Hari's Last Dance.

Tania says

"Some people are so impoverished all they have is gold. We, however, have pride.

This was a quick, easy read about (yet another) piece of history mostly unknown to me. As part of the story the author included information on things like the caste system and the hindu religion. These explanations were brilliant: short, but extremely clear and for the first time I would be able to quickly explain these concepts to my children. I thoroughly enjoyed the story, and couldn't put the book down, I kept saying just one more chapter, okay... just another chapter. I will be adding Michelle Moran's other titles to my TBR list, as I think she makes history extremely accessible, very similar to Philippa Gregory.

The Story: Though the title belongs to Rani Lakshmi, queen of the kingdom of Jhansi, it is Sita Bhopal, her most trusted confidante, who narrates the tale. Too poor to marry, Sita faces life as a temple prostitute unless she earns a spot in the Durga Dal, the queen's elite group of female guards.

Ena Hase?i? says

Radnja romana smještena je u Indiju u XIX stoljeće, za vrijeme vladavine kraljice Lakšmi Bai. Nisam ?itala ostale prevedene romane Michelle Moran, iako je jako hvaljena i ima odlične ocjene. Ova me privukla zahvaljujući Pri?ama za laku noć za djevojčice buntovnice u kojoj sam ?itala o kraljici ?iji je period vladavine je opisan u ovom romanu.

U središtu romana je Sito, djevojka koja iz siromašnog sela dolazi na dvor biti pripadnica Durga Dala, skupine djevojaka obučenih nizom vještina, a ?iji je glavni zadatak hrabro štiti kraljicu i, ukoliko je to potrebno, za nju dati život. Kroz njene oči pratimo život na dvoru - prijateljstva i neprijateljstva, spletke, historijska dešavanja u Indiji koja je tada bila pod britanskom vlašću, te sam način života i običaje. Preporučujem :)

Justine Gower says

God, what a downer. Everything just falls apart at the end. I guess it's realistic given the subject matter but pretty depressing.

I feel that this book is one of Moran's weaker novels. The real point of the story, the revolution, is overshadowed by her coverage of the main character's training and journey to become a warrior. The events of the revolution are then told in a blow-by-blow fashion (this happened, then this, then this...), so that it all happens very quickly and at the end of the book. When the title of the book is "Rebel Queen," you sort of expect that the queen's act of rebellion will be the centerpiece of the story.

Another reviewer pointed out that for all the focus on Sita's training to be a bodyguard to the queen, we really don't get to see her in action. It's true! She's supposed to be very skilled with different weapons, but because of the way Moran glosses over the revolution, there's really no opportunity for us to watch Sita fight. She shoots an arrow at someone and hits him in the arm. That's it.

The voyage to England felt pointless. I didn't do any research, so I don't know if it really happened, but either way it wasn't an interesting or integral part of the novel.

Kahini's treachery could've been fleshed out a bit more. That had potential but it always seemed to be off on the sidelines until BAM! It's important and relevant!

The way things ended up with Sita's family was a total bummer. I don't have anything particularly negative to say about it other than I just didn't like it. I expected things to turn out differently because of the close relationship Sita shares with her father and sister. The reality was a massive letdown. It felt like Sita couldn't catch a break, and I generally don't like stories that go in that direction. She did get a moderately happy ending, which helped.

Overall, I believe it was a mistake to use Sita as the narrator. Moran wants to tell the story of the rebel queen, but we're stuck in Sita's head. That's not a bad thing, but it means that this isn't really the queen's story. I think the author had a hard time deciding where she wanted to go with this, and unfortunately, it shows.

I liked this book okay. I kept reading it, which is better than not wanting to come back to it night after night. Ah well, on to the next!

Kayla Edwards says

Once again, Michelle Moran has completely captivated her audience with glimmers of the past. Her storytelling weaves a tale from pieces of history, broken hearts, betrayal, love, and sacrifice to breathe life into the Rebel Queen and those dear to her. It was an emotional roller coaster, but one I would not have wanted to miss.

This book will appeal to anyone interested in history, India, remarkable women, court intrigue, international politics, family drama, or who just wants a good, 'ole-fashioned story about a poor girl working her way up in the world with nothing more than her own determination and honesty. I would quickly recommend it to anyone in the mood for a wonderfully powerful story.

I received this ARC from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Iset says

I liked *Rebel Queen*.

This may be surprising, coming from a reader who disliked Michelle Moran's trio of Egyptian novels and who felt that her French Revolution duo were so-so. Simply put, the Egyptian set didn't feel to me like they captured the zeitgeist of the times at all, or that Moran understood the people. This was combined with what I felt was overly simplistic plot and a degree of stock characterisation that felt really unpolished and lacking in skill. That said, I noticed a slight upwards trend in my ratings that continued into the author's French Revolution novels; these I found passably entertaining, although at times that simplistic plot showed up again with a couple of absurd incidents that just stretched my believability too far. I found myself questioning the ratings I gave those two in the run up to reading *Rebel Queen*, wondering whether I simply enjoyed Moran's French Revolution novels more because she'd moved on to an era where I was by comparison relatively ignorant. But I decided not to revise my ratings; I had written a personal review of my reaction to those books which was just as valid as any other. Maybe it was because I'm not a French Revolution specialist, but I did feel that Moran was gradually improving as an author, the breadth of language seeming to expand, the dropping or lessening of juvenile elements such as stock characterisations

and info dumps. With each book she seemed to wring one extra rating point. But I really enjoyed *Rebel Queen*, and in a solid, definite way too, not just in the lukewarm way I mildly enjoyed her French Revolution novels. And it may surprise some, but I'm glad. I didn't pick up Moran's Egypt novels a few years back and think "I hope I don't enjoy them". I was excited that a new writer was writing about ancient Egypt, and hoping that I'd stumbled across something fantastic. Moran's Egypt novels didn't quite turn out that way for me, but am I happy that Moran's slowly turned it around and that *Rebel Queen* is a book I truly enjoyed? You bet I am!

So, what were the magic ingredients in *Rebel Queen*? First, Moran made an excellent decision to make her main character entirely fictional. Moran is totally free to create Sita Bhosale out of wholesale cloth and she spends a great deal of time weaving a background for her that feels plausible. Not only that but Moran's attention to detail and skill at language has improved so much so that Sita's fictional life came across as evocative and authentic. In the same breath, Moran is able to slip this character seamlessly into historical events because of the huge gaps in the historical record in this era, and Sita still comes off believable and doesn't take over the story (a la Mary Sue original characters in historical fiction). Likewise, the Kahini subplot. Based on what survives from the historical record, Kahini and her plot would seem to be entirely fictional, yet, because the story still ultimately holds to historical events and there are gaps in the record, Moran can afford to slip in this twist and get away with it. It would seem that Moran is beginning to learn the historical fiction writer's craft of subtly altering the history or making use of the gaps without warping or distorting the actual history itself. Of course, I may end up with egg on my face; I know several acquaintances who are specialists in Indian history are quite nervously awaiting this book since they say that Indian history is often badly misrepresented in historical fiction. But to me, as a non-specialist on this topic, I have to say it felt largely authentic; not just the making use of gaps and good adherence to the historical record, but the attention to detail and evocativeness, as I said. This time round it really felt like Moran had a decent understanding of the social attitudes and inner thoughts of the historical figures.

The one big deviation Moran does make is including the Circular Memorandum in the events of the book – an event which actually took place in 1886. Moran acknowledges this in her notes, but doesn't explain why she transposed the event. Did she want to offend the readers' sensibilities and stoke their resentment? Because I have to say the horrific brutalities of the time committed by both sides were more than adequate at stirring my empathy. My historian's sense of fairness and objectivity is protesting a little at that being laid at the door of 1855 instead of the real perpetrators of 1886. Whilst I'm on the subject of niggles, sometimes Moran seemed to use "English" and "England" when what she meant was "British" or "Britain". Also, I have to agree with a friend who said the blurb was misleading. The blurb gave me the impression that Rani Lakshmbai would be a perspective character and dominate the story, or at least share it equally with Sita, but really it's Sita's story throughout. The promised raising of armies and riding into battles actually doesn't happen until about 90% of the way through the book, and in fact the line about raising one army of women and another of men – I never saw that mentioned once in the novel. From the blurb I had thought that war preparations would gear up by at least the halfway point, if not a little earlier, and the heart of the story would focus on the rani's battles – a pretty exciting prospect to read about. Instead it comes late on and feels a little too glossed over and confused – I would've appreciated more time lingering on these events. What we get instead is a compelling story of Sita's life struggles, which in its own way made for a good read – it just wasn't what the blurb led me to expect I'd be getting. If I had a wishlist for this book it would be that it had been 500 pages instead of the actual 348 – that way the build-up of Sita's story could still have been told, and then the military action could have formed the core and heart of the tale with all the lavish page space it deserves.

Some of Moran's old bad writing habits remain, but the good news is she's learnt how to disguise them now, and do it well. I used to cringe at the clumsy info dumping in *Cleopatra's Daughter*. There is info dumping

here – Sita on several occasions outright explains points about Indian culture and history direct to the reader – but Moran gets away with it completely because she’s framed the whole story with Sita being persuaded to write her memoirs. At one point I did feel that the stock characterisation comes up again, when Sita is introduced to the other members of the Durga Dal, but over the course of the rest of the book further information about these characters is revealed, and since the book is told entirely from Sita’s perspective it makes sense that some characters are more thinly sketched than others. Speaking of the book being written from first person perspective, I’ve often observed that this is an awkward choice for historical fiction since grand events often have to be conveyed at which the narrator was not completely present. However, for a memoir framework around a historical novel, it works perfectly. It flowed smoothly and didn’t jar or write itself into any awkward corners at all, part of that being due to the historical gaps allowing Moran to place Sita ideally in the tale, at the rani’s right hand. The only niggle I can think of with writing style was that I knew what would come of Sita’s decision about the letter courier the instant it was first mentioned, saw that one coming from a mile off.

Whilst I had a couple of niggles here and there, and I definitely wished we’d spent more time with the rani and on the actual battles, I found this book enjoyable, engrossing, and a solid read. *Rebel Queen* definitely continues Moran’s upwards trend. I can honestly say I would be happy to recommend to others.

7 out of 10

Reeda Booke says

This is the story of Rani Lakshmi the queen of Jhansi told through the eyes of one of her warrior guard-women, Sita. Rani ruled the kingdom of Jhansi until the British East India Company annexed its territories in 1853 after a brutal and bloody war.

I do not know much about India's history, and know little about their customs and culture except for what you see on TV or the tidbits you read about in other books, so I was instantly drawn into this tale about one of the country's most important females and her role in history. I loved learning about their culture and way of life though I have to say the caste system is a harsh subject to read about and one of the customs called "purdah", or the seclusion of women from public viewing, I found extremely sad.

The story is told through Sita, who lives in a small village with her father, sister and cruel grandmother. As one of two girls in the family with no dowry to offer a prospective husband, the grandmother almost sells Sita to a prostitute temple but is saved by her father who decides to train her to become a Durgavasi, a member of an elite group of females who guard and protect the rani, of which there are only ten at any one time. From here, you will have to read the book to find out what happens because I do not want to give too much away.

Suffice it to say, I found the book hard to put down and would definitely recommend it, especially for all historical fiction fans.

Erin says

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I knew nothing about Queen Lakshmi or the Indian Rebellion of 1857 when I picked up Michelle Moran's *Rebel Queen*. My eye was drawn to the unusual locale and an eagerness to experience a story that was both foreign and entirely unfamiliar. I'd enjoyed Moran's work in the past and was optimistic of my prospects, but looking back I can't help feeling the reality fell short of my expectations.

In theory, Sita was a well-positioned narrator, but I don't feel Moran's treatment of the character lived up to the jacket description. Sita spends relatively little one-on-one time with Queen Lakshmi and much like Varvara in Eva Stachniak's *The Winter Palace*, is wholly removed from the queen during the most exciting and important events of the narrative. The emotional and at times physical distance between Moran's heroine and her headliner is substantial and I felt that fact limited the author's ability to convincingly develop the queen's complexities and personal views.

I was further frustrated by the pacing and tone of the narrative. I truly appreciated the cultural insight Moran offered throughout the text, but I spent most of my reading waiting for something to happen. Eighty percent of the novel focuses on some form of sisterhood and that's great, but I personally found the quiet intimacy of those relationships tedious and dull. I crave movement, action, political tension and urgency, but such moments didn't arrive till the eleventh hour and felt exceedingly awkward tacked on in final moments of Sita's story.

At the end of the day, I learned a lot from *Rebel Queen*, but I can't help wondering if my personal tastes would be better satisfied by the work of John Masters or Christopher Nicole. I don't regret the time I spent with this book, but I don't think it Moran's strongest release and would have reservations recommending it forward.

Luu says

Je to taký malý skrytý poklad (napriek menu autorky). Deväťročná Sita bude o pár mesiacov zrelá na vydaj, ale potom matka privedie na svet ďalšiu dcéru, pri pôrode zomrie a chudobná dedinská rodina má zrazu Problém. Panovačná stará matka sa rozhodne Situ predať na prostitúciu, ale milovaný otec to na poslednú chvíľu zarazí a oznámi že hahá, ja ju naučím bojovať a stane sa z nej osobná strážkyňa kráľovnej.

Takže Sita sa po nejakom čase dostáva na kráľovský dvor, kde je ako dedinčanka úplný outsider, nemá ani poňatia o etikete, žiadne peniaze na nové šaty, a keď ju za ne jedna z jej kolegyň šikanovať, nemá sa ani komu posťažovať, lebo kolegyňa je kráľovná príbuzná. Okolo toho všetkého funguje magická India, zaujímavé zvyky, pekný kapitán (a keďže strážkyne žijú v celibáte, pekný iba zďačky) a na posledných stranách aj trochu tej vojny a rebélie z názvu. V podstate také indické Pamäti gejšy. Odkedy stále dookola čítam iba historickú fikciu o Európe, ma táto kultúrna zmena nadchla, a autorka si narozdiel od poslednej knihy mohla dovoliť viac vymýšľať, takže sa to nemusí tak kľovito držať známych vecí a číta sa to viac ako príbeh. Odporúčam, je to super. **8/10**
