

# Supportive Male Characters in the Emergence of Rani of Jansi in Jaishree Mishra's *RANI*: A Postmodern Reader Perspective

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**Abstract:** Challenges are rule of thumb for all leaders. A selfless leader, who combats for a cause and lives a life for his people, won't pass that pressure of those challenges toward his subjects. He withstands all critical situations, eventually eclipses casualty and accepts the obstacles that cross his way without any cross. Especially, an efficient and eminent leader never grumbles over miseries but tries to prove his mettle compassionately and it is chronicled in history which stands as a testimony for his reign. Rani of Jhansi represents the women rulers, who stand a cut above the rest during colonial reign in India. This paper targets not only on the success of Rani, but also the postmodern male characters in large and a few female characters that support Lakshmi Bai from her childhood days, until she ascends the throne of Jhansi. Lakshmi Bai obtains backup from male characters. Though Manikarnika, (Lakshmi Bai's childhood name) is trained to be a submissive and obliging female by her aunt, her father, god father (Peshwa) and Major Ellis pave way for her to emerge as a successful woman as a ruler. Jaishree Mishra's *Rani* (2008), stands as an icon of unconquerable audacity of a woman leader by name Rani in the nineteenth century.

**Key words:** Postmodern women, women leaders, patriarchal society, colonial India, colonization.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Postmodernists are those who follow or possess postmodern concepts or traits. They are not confined to any particular age. Postmodern strands can be traced even ages hence. For instance, even in historic past, revolutionary women characters like Lakshmi of Jhansi, Rani Velu Nachiar of Siva Ganga (Tamil Nadu, India) proved their mettle through their valour. They did not cringe up their spirit to fight for a cause. They were bold enough to assert their identity for the welfare of their people. However in the view of the researcher the success of female characters are made possible because of postmodernist men who act as their aide to play a lead role. Men like Moropant, Manikarnika's father, Major Ellis, Peshwa Sahib, Raja Gangadhar all helped in the emergence of Manikarnika, from an innocent and unassuming child to an elegant and illustrious administrator through their support in various phases of her life. A woman feels complemented when she gets support from her life partner or her parents to stabilize her life. This subjective perception made the researcher focus on Rani, who occupies a few pages in history even after centuries because of her achievement which was mainly possible by her male aides.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The paper targets to unfurl the support contributed by the male characters to brace up the protagonist Manikarnika, not to have a smooth sail but to face the rough sea with equanimity and aplomb in administration. As an administrator, Rani always takes side for peace as well as justice. The political affairs pose her challenges and turmoil that could wield her to destruction. Mani's evolution as Lakshmi Bai amidst multifarious situations that barb her personal life is astounding. Though she is a girl child, she is not marginalized in her family. Equality and equity is provided to young Mani, which later helped her to run a government and dealing with issues that ought to be sorted out by an efficient ruler. Opinion of the individuals matters a lot among postmodernists. Manikarnika's father and Peshwa Sahib realize the value of girl's education, which in turn metamorphoses the girl. She later becomes an adept in executing her duties as a queen. Though the King Gangadhar cannot cope with Rani in her familial and nuptial desires, he gives her independence to deal with State's administration without incurring any displeasure of British Raj until his demise. The motto of the researcher is also to highlight the feat achieved by Rani of Jhansi to emphasize the backup rendered by male characters. Her achievements attest her valour and humanitarian concern toward her subjects. The historical

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pages that highlight Rani's deed made us be aware of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women who are capable of reaching the foreground in administration.

Through this paper it is reinforced that Lakshmi's laurels and accolades are possible because of the external support she receives from her parent to her life partner. Accepting the potential of a woman is laudable. The 19<sup>th</sup> century men are no exception to that. They endorse a woman like Lakshmi as an eminent administrator.

### **III. POSTMODERNISM – AN OVERVIEW**

Postmodernism was the extension of modernism, because it shared many of the features of modernism. The amalgamation of these two theories and their strands are revealed in our life style also. Exterior of not only an individual but also materials plays a predominant role in the contemporary society. Pastiche and parody are adopted by both modernism and postmodernism. Postmodern theorists listed out a few features of postmodernism. Extreme self-reflectivity is the predominant feature among many. Individual and individuality are prioritized. Irony and parody are the corner stone for postmodern artists. They employed these in their work of art. More than that, these two elements haunted the common men too. They had a flair for these elements. Simultaneously the postmodernists had made the line invisible between high and low cultural forms. They disintegrated the benchmark between high and low art forms. The traditional concepts such as marginalized women education and their empowerment indicate grand narratives. These beliefs which were followed by us without questioning have spread its tentacles in religion, subjectivity and nationhood. Postmodernists questioned these narratives whenever they disagree with the age old credulous dogmas that we follow, unaware of their sources and reasons behind them. Fear psychosis engrossed the psyche of postmodernists because of the advancement of technology. The actions of an individual are monitored round the clock and this triggers paranoia. Disorientation prevails in the postmodern era has its origin in the post colonial period. The practice, culture and the habits which were followed by English masters influenced the inhabitants, and in due course their custom and culture were the sole cause for the disorientation. After the independence, colonial hangover hovered over all the colonized nations. Secondary orality is in vogue because of electronic and print media. As the happenings across the globe spread widely, even the illiterates are conscious of day-to-day updates and this trend has enabled them to know the happenings across the globe via oral media sources.

#### **STRANDS OF POSTMODERNISM**

Jean Francois Lyotard propagates the decline of grand narratives in his views on "postmodern condition". He highlights the emergence of fragmented knowledge. Postmodern individuals remain assertive in projecting their uniqueness. They welcome fragmentation and disorientation. They accept reality. Nothing stuns or shocks postmodern people. They endorse Derridean concept called 'differance' which highlights the postponement of the centre. Postmodernism suggests that everything is disorder whereas modernism believes in binary opposition.

Postmodernist thinker Lyotard identifies the order, stability and unity which are strictly followed by modernists as a meta narrative, at the same time postmodernism questions and deconstructs meta narratives, postmodernism propagates mini narratives on the ground that grand narratives hide, silence and negate contradictions, instabilities and differences inherent in any social system.

#### **FEATURES OF POSTMODERNISTS**

Tumbahang, (2021) argued that advancements in technology have evacuated most of the traditional system and narratives that are practised ages hence. The advancements also prodded people to ask questions on established norms and values. Nothing was permanent in the perspective of postmodern. Flexibility was accepted by postmodern individuals. Brevity was preferred by everyone instead of voluminous description and bulky notes. Postmodern generations advocate memes, when moderns hailed Google because they needed vast resources for in-depth study and research. Classical or canonical writers were not welcomed instead bestsellers were preferred by youths to windup a work of art in a short span of time. Advancement in communication technology enabled us to reach the globe and made the universe a 'global village'. Rigid rules were not framed by a postmodern individual. The postmodern individual never adored a fictitious hero; he himself became a hero for him. He did not need any external source to be inspired. Self adoration was predominant.

Postmodern age is also called as the age of 'displacement' that is, one thing displaces the other in no time. The irony is that a large section of world population is supposed to be living the only modern life or even pre-modern sober and under the strict codes and conducts.

### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

Postmodern tool was not employed but the postmodern perspective was used to analyse the endeavour taken by a few family members and well-wishers of Rani. Postmodernists are not those who belong to 1960s. People who have postmodern qualities with the traits of postmodernists in all periods irrespective of their age

are acknowledged as postmodernists. The moral support from the team of postmodernist men enabled Rani to prove her grit. Lakshmi's father and her husband were visionaries and they foresaw the future that hold a lot in store for Lakshmi. More than the character Lakshmi of Jhansi, it was the people in her family and court, supported her in diverse ways, and that drew the attention of the researcher to investigate on the postmodern attitude of the male characters in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## V. SUMMARY

Jaishree Misra's *Rani* is the standing testimony of the writer who proves her enticing skills as an author through her adept writing skill. Her spade work to infuse life to the character Rani is vivid in each chapter. The writer's journey to the past mirrors the efforts and the sacrifice of many historical characters, that fights each moment to safe guard the souls of Indian soil. They struggled to the core to live with peace and dignity. Lakshmi Bai's father, Peshwa Sahib, the British official Major Ellis and her husband Gangadhar chisel her to be a dynamic leader. Behind every successful man there is a woman goes the saying. Of course, it is the other way round in the case of Lakshmi Bai. She does not have one supporter but many, who in each stage of her life accomplish her silently without much fanfare. The readers can sense the undercurrent of concern shown by the male characters in the emergence of Lakshmi Bai, as a queen.

The story kick starts with Manikarnika's life in Varanasi. Peshwa Sahib, once the Maratha ruler, (ruled Pune) is restrained by Britishers to continue as a ruler. He was sent on an exile to Varanasi. So he, with his adopted sons Nana and Tantia lives a luxurious life in a palatial Saturday House with the fund provided by the colonizers every month. Mani's father is one of the trustworthy aides of Peshwa Sahib. The trios – Mani, Nana, and Tantia are given education at home. In the mid nineteenth century, a girl received education like boys, who belonged to the royal family is a creditable endeavor taken by the elders like Moropant and Peshawa. Mani's father is well aware that Peshwa's adopted sons won't be supportive or take care of Mani after his life time. His anxiety finds a new hope when Raja Gangadhar seeks for the hands of Mani. Initially Moropant hesitates because Raja Gangadhar is nearly his age, whereas Mani is not even fourteen years. Life of a motherless child is always a troublesome deal. Asharfi, Mani's maternal aunt convinced Moropant saying:

"Girls who are allowed to grow too much before marriage only grow into trouble" (Rani, 30)  
Moropant's aim is to make use of "the chance to elevate his daughter's position to one of royalty" (Rani, 37). Moropant does not want Mani's future to go insipid. Mani is an equestrian and her acquisition skill in learning English is not left unnoticed by her father. He trusts that fragile Raja will be aided by Mani, both in his domestic and public life. This ray of hope pervades through Moropant and he nods an affirmative response to Gangadhar's proposal.

The postmodern father, Moropant, aims high of his daughter and his vision transforms Mani from a jubilant and independent girl to a composed and responsible Rani of Jhansi. It is quite surprising that Gangadhar, a puny king of Jhansi allows his wife to deal with day's ordeal and she is allowed to stay subjective in the forum where no women are allowed. Some people in the court do not welcome the bold step of Raja but a few endorse the service renders by Rani Lakshmi Bai. The death of Gangadhar and the defamation of Rani with Major Ellis turn everything upside down in Rani's life.

Lakshmi Bai finds it hard to withstand the limitations set by British Raj. She tries to bring in friendly terms between Jhansi and Britishers, whereas all her efforts go futile and ends in war. It is assumed that Rani breathes her last in the battle field.

## RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Emergence of new women is common in the postmillennial era. There were some women like Lakshmi Bai who are the pioneers of these new women in the contemporary period. Those women lead a life of their own. Their contributions at the cost of their desires are not prioritized by many but Mishra showcases the woman ruler in the nineteenth century, who remains an authentication for many women who live in the postmillennial era. The writer has done preliminary investigation in both the colonized and colonisers' nations to substantiate her writing that serves as a time machine for the readers to travel through the days that explicitly speak of the ventures of the young queen. It is implied that life is not easy for a woman who tries to be a ruler. Our former Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Benazir Buto, Pakistani Prime Minister and former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu too face quirks. However they never give up their passion and determination to serve the nation / state and its people. It is the true quality of a leader to withstand the oddities and adversities without stepping back from the endeavor. These qualities are traced in all the women leaders irrespective of the age they live in. All the female leaders are boosted by their parents and gain moral support from them. This is evident in the case of Lakshmi Bai also. The proven administration of the aforementioned women leaders create way for the women in present scenario to involve in administration. Women leaders of the past bring a transition in the view of men to give opportunity for women and it thus results in the emergence of many women administrators in state, national and global levels.

## VI. DISCUSSION

In order to elucidate the support rendered by postmodern male and female characters who support Mani, the article focused on the role of male characters in empowering Mani and contributions of female characters toward her progress as a successful administrator. The working hours for humans is structured and designed as per patriarchies desire from time immemorial. And this in turn implies that matriarchies are marginalized. On the contrary, most of the time majority of us fails to notice that both the sexes cannot dispel each other because their effort in unison alone will result in the progress of the society. There is always hunt among human race to stand atop in their life. When it is questioned for whom the race is held? The answer is explicit. The race is to satisfy the desire of a woman whom a man has chosen and vice versa for a woman. At times a woman involves in the race to prove her or to equip herself when a man fails to satisfy her demands. Their contributions and dependence are indispensable.

In the novel, Moropant trains Mani from her childhood days to face the "real enemy" (*Rani*, 17) along with Tantia and Nana. It is the concern of Moropant that Mani should not be vulnerable to the domestic issue that Tantia and Nana incur. He strongly believes that Mani's responsibility is inevitable to fight for a cause especially to save the people of his soil from firangis.

Mani, even in her teens wishes to be an independent ruler of Jhansi. Once Nana addresses Raja Gangadhar as "a British lackey" Mani's anger triggers and she tries to justify that Gangadhar must be in friendly terms with British and there "...must be good reason to do. Maybe he is just a very good ruler" (*Rani*, 37). Though Gangadhar is fragile and fail to satisfy Mani in their relationship, she has the affinity toward her spouse and mentally prepares herself to be the aide of him in administration. The liberty that she has, enables her to stay composed even amidst the turmoil that she faces.

Moropant Tambe does not fail to notice "Mani as having a wise soul, quite unlike other children her age" (*Rani* 40). The alliance between Peshwa and Gangadhar is to reinforce the native's power on Indian soil against the colonial masters. Mani is the savior to underpin the ties between the states. A political bond is tied through nuptial bond. Mani does not prepare for the wedding. She has the innate teenage dreams and is not perturbed by anything. Eventually the wedding plan has convinced her mind with a mental note that, "...to achieve the happiness of this dear old man and her father was as honourable a reason as any" (*Rani* 42). Peshwa, the old man encourages Mani, "As queen, you will have so much to see and learn" (*Rani* 42). He further adds that

Marriages are unions between not just two people but entire families and communities. In your case, it also includes the union of states and royal lines, which puts a heavy burden on your young shoulders. (*Rani* 42). Peshwa and the elders in the palace feel that for Mani, the young girl the responsibility is too much for her age but they all are confident that she can cope with all the challenges of life. Being a girl Mani's ability is not overlooked or marginalized whereas the trust and conviction that all have got on the aptitude and attitude of Mani are superior to that of the adopted sons of Peshwa.

It is the men, Moropant and Peshwa who rely on Mani than the woman like Ashrafi and so these people treat her equal to that of boys from her birth. However Mani's aunt infuses the idea that her role as a wife to the Raja is to be a subordinate partner. She stresses that, He is not like your father or Peshwa-sahib is to you, child, indulging your every whim. Even if silly ideas like that occur to you, you will just have to learn to tuck them away somewhere deep in your mind, promise me that! (*Rani* 46).

Women, by default are ready to wield to the desire of their husbands because they are taught so. They inherit that quality or at times they are enforced to remain timid. That becomes a magic spell for them to stay subservient to their husbands to have the credit as a good wife.

The holistic development of Mani from a girl to a woman kick starts from her domestic life. It is inferred that, as a girl Mani does not fight for equality or any justice done to her. She represents all the citizens of Indian soil to protect her nation against the British Raj. Lakshmi Bai and her husband never try to drive away the colonizers, where as they try to maintain a comradery relationship with them. They believe in the growth of their country because of the British rulers with the notion that the relationship with the firangis will bring progress and improve the economic status.

Doctrine of Lapse creates a tremor to Gangadhar. He does not have male heir to his throne. After learning about Nagpur incident, Raja enquires Ellis about the annexation of Nagpur regime with British Raj even after treaty being signed that the legacy of Nagpur has to be passed on to Bhonsle family after the death of Maharaja Raghu. Despite the treaty signed annexation happened, and the British official Cavendish also approved that. Gangadhar is anxious over that news. He himself utters the statement " ....we try to help the company as much as we can so that we can all survive and jointly carry out the administration of this land" (114). Rani who is at the court passes a remark that the rumour might be spread out by the people of the court. This immediate response from her made Ellis think thus "...if she was blessed with genuine perspicacity ....to make an extreme accurate guess...." (114). Her proactive sense nails her role as an eminent future ruler of

Jhansi. Ellis observes that “a young woman already involved in state matters...most commendable of the king to be making an effort to include his new bride in court affairs”(114). He also perceives that this situation will not interrupt his relationship with Raja. The contribution of Rani toward the matters of state governance is supported by the Jhansi's political agent Ellis, which is highly condemned by Raja's elder brother Krishna Rao. This incident elucidates the then situation at Jhansi that all men do not give opportunity to women as rulers. However, the men in the foremost power (Gangadhar, Peshwa, Moropant and Ellis) acknowledge the woman like Rani, she sets a milestone in the Indian history as a woman of valour and determination. Rani and her husband do not fight for Indian freedom but they fight for their rights to save the citizens of Jansi's soil. They recognize the reformation brought by British Raj to eradicate 'Sati'. They feel that the progress and development that they have seen in their soil is essential and they can happen only because of British imperial power. The patience shown by Gangadhar and his wife is not welcomed by Gangadhar's brother, Krishna, still, he too admits the intellectual eminence and the political comprehension of the new Rani when compared to Raja's first wife, who was so docile. The support rendered by many of the courtiers and the people of Jhansi forbids Krishna from protesting against the royal couple vehemently and openly. So a woman's success and her rights are reiterated by her husband, and it is evident in the case of Rani.

Rani's emergence as a successful ruler rose up during the presence of the men like Gangadhar, Moropant and Major Ellis. The former two provide moral support, which acts as a saddle for Rani to travel comfortably. The death of Gangadhar curbs her freedom partially, especially financial crisis and the relationship with British Raj representative Ellis. In the absence of Moropant, Rani relies much on Major Ellis, this spreads a vicious perception among people. After the departure of Ellis she remains all alone, relying only on the citizens, but that does not help her for a long time. Her progress stops abruptly. She has a humanitarian concern to save British officials too, when they are left in tantrums of Indians. Her main objective is to bring prosperity to nation by working with British Raj. She did not forbid the arrival of English officials and their implementation of certain legislatures as per their convenience just like Doctrine of lapse. Rani looks at the positive side of colonial power. She and her husband want to develop their kingdom with the help of imperial power, whose efforts to bring in sophistications

After the death of Raja Gangadhar, Rani discarded the theatre props left by him. She does not believe in the grand narrative of keeping the fond materials of the demised in memory of them for a time being. On the contrary, Rani wishes to keep her past memoir away from her routine. The death of Raja, without fulfilling any of her familial desires may be one of the reasons for her to do away with Raja's stuff. Though Raja is persistent in retaining the power of his wife as a Queen after his death, he fails in his duty as a husband. As a well-wisher of Lakshmi Bai he cares her profusely,

### **Review of Literature**

Dei, Maryna O et.al. (2021) opined that the objective of postmodernism is to do away with logical communication and assert the end of the general metadiscourse of rationalism. In his view, postmodernity should be seen as the transplantation of aesthetic matrices into substitute, deceptive, diverse ones, which disguised the authentic spirit of phenomena and processes.

Tatyana Gumenyuk (2021) stated that the principles and discernment of the postmodern are inconsistent with the current time, and in its pits, a new worldview begins to develop, conservatively called post-postmodern, as a retort to overcoming the current socio-cultural catastrophe. Post-postmodern, postmodern, like modern before them and similar phenomena are links of one chain, interconnected with each other and logically following from the processes of previous eras. According to him, post-postmodern is formed from the problems of the postmodern. As a result, the study showed that the currently being formed new worldview - post-postmodernity came close to the search for a new spirituality for the all-round development of a person and turning him into a socially mature being, as well as for resolving the internal contradictions of the postmodern worldview.

Kavita Singh (2022) said that Misra has made an in-depth exploration while writing the novel. During the course of this exploration, she came across different doctrines of incidences happened in Rani Lakshmi Bai's Life. These novels and doctrines accepts the fact that Rani was a brave warrior who made many sacrifices before finally sacrificing her life in a battle, but some theories accuse her of a heinous crime killing children and women of British rulers at Joka Bagh. Though Misra states that her work is a fiction based on incidents happened in her life, but this work makes readers believe that there is some logic behind it and this work seems to be a real work which explores the incidences happened.

Bommana Indu (2022) stated that feminists are not only females but also include men; that is, men or women who support and respect the ideas of upcoming women's movements are considered feminist. People have different and varied opinions, so they express their views and ideas through their medium of expression. In Indian writing in English, many male and female writers show how women suffer in the dominant society and seek to abolish patriarchy. Monalisa Konwar (2021) felt that the author tries to recuperate the queen from being

„frozen in the static no -time“ and pays with the idea of the female as surviving through the telling of her tales. Therefore in Rani Jaishree Misra probes the fictional manipulation of history as a paradigm for exploring and exploding both gendered and national identity and reconfigures a residue of Indian history.

Deivasigamani, T (2021) observed that, in all the novels, Jaishree Misra depicted the courageous women with big deal of sufferings. These sufferings often caused by their own faulty doings or mistakes. However, these sufferings are implemented by their patriarchal surroundings. The female characters of Misra are sometimes weak, but gradually gain courage and confidence to face the harsh realities of life. Her females are entirely different in their nature and their viewpoints. They represent the various parts of human lives. Their circumstances and living milieus are pictured in high contrast. However, it is clearly said that the writer gives the vivid image of New Woman through her astonishing characters in her novels. Vinitha Deepak Vakkayil (2019) shared their views that, economic empowerment can lead women to better political and social standards. All women empowerment measures should be legalized and formalized for implementation. The legal guarantees should be simplified and people friendly and the government should create legal awareness programme to update women about the legal guarantees given by the law. The year 1848 marked the rise of women's empowerment in India. Our country got its first woman educator in the form of Savitribai Phule, who busted the social norm that a woman cannot be educated. The impact of this movement was so deep and profound that after 100 years India, as a nation accepted the leadership of a woman and Indira Gandhi became the first woman to be the prime minister of India. It was the fruit of women's empowerment. Particularly after the declaration of 1976-85 as the decade for women by the United Nations, question of empowering women as equal partner in all walks of life became a critical issue throughout the world.

Minumol M S, Jhansi ki Rani (2020) said that the novel altogether is a compilation of Rani as a female power as well as a strong warrior. At times Rani comes out of the veil of a tender woman and fights for her people and her thoughts. Jaishree Mishra's novel consists of a love episode of Rani and Ellis which creates an unconventional bonding among them, which cannot be accepted by the Indians as they don't want their war queen to be looked down in such a derogatory way. Being an iconoclast of her age, she swept away all the conventions of a typical aristocrat woman and threw away all the fetters that restricted her to be herself. Through the novel *Rani*, we can find a conclusion that the topic of Women empowerment is not something that just started today but centuries before the same was discussed in different styles and manner

#### **LIMITATIONS**

Research could have been broadened by referring to other historical women characters, who have contributed toward independence. Postmodern attributes of women characters like Rani's aunt and her aides in Gangadhar's palace could have been analysed like male characters who supported her.

#### **VII. CONCLUSION**

The world functions as per the design and schedule framed by patriarchal society. However the patriarchy realises the fact, that women's contribution toward the society is inevitable. They respect and give her due respect and dignity when they find her to be indomitable and determined. The visionaries who happen upon the spirited women with quantum of calibre dare to provide a platform to the members of fair sex, apart from looking them as a normal human who are vulnerable to emotions. There are numerous instances and incidences which affidavit the responsibility played by men to adorn the driving force called women. Walter Leal Filho et. al. (2023), suggested that awareness should be provided to promote gender equality for the sustainable growth of globe. Rani did not go against some of the implementations of colonial masters in the development of nation. She wanted to enhance the welfare of her people by joining hands with imperial power. She was amicable toward English officials and their family members also. The humanitarian concern along with leadership skills made her a way ahead of the field. The support rendered by the male characters that were highlighted previously was ad-on for her prowess. Rani is recognised as the Queen of Substance by the e journal *Columns* because of her resilience and determination to safeguard her soil and people. Thus it is inferred that a female's counterpart, her parents and her kin proffer their support as an axle in her life. This back up will strengthen her mental stamina and be a part of a healthy society.

#### **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict to disclose

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