

## UNIT 38 – UPSC - Jhanshi - Rani Laxmibai

**India's History : Modern India : Zanshichi Rani Laxmibai - Freedom struggle in 1857**

### Zanshi - Rani Laxmibai



Lakshmi Bai was born on 19 November 1835 at Kashi (Presently known as Varanasi). Her father Moropanth was a brahmin and her mother Bhagirathibai was cultured, intelligent and religious. Born Manikarnika, she was affectionately called Manu in her family. Manu lost her mother at the age of four, and responsibility for the young girl fell to her father. She completed her education and martial training, which included horse riding, fencing and shooting, when she was still a child.

She married Raja Gangadhar Rao, the Maharaja of Jhansi in 1842, and became the Rani of Jhansi. After the marriage she was given the name Lakshmi Bai. The ceremony of the marriage was performed in Ganesh Mandir, the temple of Lord Ganesh situated in the old city of Jhansi. Rani Lakshmi Bai gave birth to a son in 1851, but this child died when he was about four months old. After this, the couple adopted Damodar Rao as their son. Maharaja Gangadhar Rao also expired on 21 November 1853, when Lakshmi Bai was 18 years old.

At that time Lord Dalhousie was the Governor General of British India. Though little Damodar Rao, adopted son of late Maharaja Gangadhar Rao and Rani Lakshmi Bai was Maharaja's heir and successor as per the Hindu tradition, the British rulers rejected Rani's claim that Damodar Rao was their legal heir. Lord Dalhousie decided to annex the state of Jhansi under the Doctrine of Lapse.

In March 1854 the British announced an annual pension of Rs. 60,000 for Rani and also ordered to leave the Jhansi fort. But Rani Lakshmi Bai was determined to defend Jhansi. She proclaimed her decision with the famous words: 'Mai apni Jhansi nahi doongi' (I will not give up my Jhansi).

Rani Lakshmi Bai started strengthening the defense of Jhansi and she assembled a volunteer army of patriots. Women were also recruited and given military training. Rani was accompanied by her generals Gulam Gaus Khan, Dost Khan, Khuda Baksh,

Lala Bhau Bakshi, Moti Bai, Sunder-Mundar, Kashi Bai, Deewan Raghunath Singh and Deewan Jawahar Singh. Many from the local population volunteered for service in the army ranks, with the popular support for her cause on the rise.

When the Revolt of 1857 broke out, Jhansi became a center of the rebellion. A small group of British officials took refuge in Jhansi's fort, and the Rani negotiated their evacuation. When the British left the fort, they were massacred by the rebels. Although the massacre probably occurred without the Rani's consent and she protested her innocence, she stood accused by the British.

In September and October of 1857, the Rani led the successful defense of Jhansi from the invading armies of the neighboring rajas of Datia and Orchha. In March of 1858, the British Army advanced on Jhansi, and laid siege to the city. After two weeks of fighting the British captured the city, but the Rani escaped the city in the guise of a man, strapping her adopted son Damodar Rao closely on her back.

She regrouped in the town of Kalpi where Tatia Tope other patriots joined her. On June 1, she and her allies captured the fortress city of Gwalior from the Sindhia rulers, who were British allies. She died three weeks later at the start of the British assault, when she was hit by a spray of bullets while riding on the fortress ramparts. The British captured Gwalior three days later. The 22 year-old Rani was cremated nearby.

Rani Lakshmi Bai, the queen of Jhansi, a Maratha-ruled princely state of northern India, was one of the great nationalist heroes of the Revolt of 1857, and a symbol of resistance to British rule in India. The Rani earned the respect of her British enemies for her bravery, and became a nationalist and feminist hero in India. When the Indian National Army created its first female unit, it was named after her.

