

A household name in India, Rani Laxmibai's name is immortal in India's freedom struggle. Her patriotism still remains a source of inspiration for Indians all around the world.

Born as Manikarnika on 15 June 1834 in Bitur province, she was renamed as Lakshmi Bai after her wedding. She was extremely precocious and talented since childhood. She had mastered swordplay and horse riding at the mere age of 12 and was received a thorough education in the science and languages. She was married to Gangadhar Rao, the king of Jhansi. Throughout her life, she faced several traumatic experiences and testing times. She never had a mother and lost her first child three months after

his birth but chose to adopt Damadar Rao, the son of one of the king's cousins. The king's health also deteriorated and she became a widow only two years after her marriage. However, she displayed resilience, both as a queen and a woman, during these testing times.



Rani of Jhansi



*The queen
who
died a
soldier*

At that time, the British Empire was gradually occupying the whole of India. After the death of King Gangadhar Rao, the Britishers' desire to merge Jhansi into their empire became strong. Rani Lakshmi Bai did not lose courage even after the death of her husband and

took on the reins of governance with zeal and full responsibility. At first she was unable to govern Jhansi due to the doctrine of Lapse introduced by Lord Dalhousie. However, Rani Lakshmi Bai used diplomacy with the British to fight for her right to rule. The annexation of Jhansi along with the British insisting on deducting the Raja's remaining debt from her pension provoked Rani. She trained a Durga dal of women warriors which included her companions and other women and was prepared to go to battle if necessary.

She didn't just lead the struggle of freedom but fought against the prejudices imposed on women. She was the epitome of strength and a living example that women are more than just wives, mothers or daughters and challenged society's paradigm of the ideal woman. She showed that a woman can be both, a great mother and a powerful queen at the same time. She has become a metaphor for courage and an inspiration to young women all over the world. The image of her charging her steed through enemy lines, her sword raised for the next thrust, with her child wrapped to her back, is forever imprinted in Indian hearts and perfectly captures her female heroism. Even as a child, she was unspoken and independent, and defied prejudices against women, and what society thought was a suitable way for women to act and behave.



Although she only ruled over a small kingdom, Rani Lakshmbai dreamt of a freedom for the whole country, and was passionate about fighting for her country's rights. In the Great Revolt of 1857, Rani Lakshmbai matched wits and forces with the best of the British generals and heavily contributed to the historic war with the British. Along with Taty Tope and Nana Saheb she resolved to uproot the British from the country. She was unfazed by the vast British army and her courage and valour added a new vigour to her army. Although she was defeated, her tremendous efforts inspired others to fulfil their duties and fight for India's freedom. Before she could reorganise a new army, General Smith attacked her from all sides. With some of her soldiers, she continued to fight bravely till the end and then got to Veergati. The British themselves, seeing Lakshmbai's bravery, called her the Indian 'John of Arc'. During this time, she also received the news that her dear friend British soldiers continued to chase the queen.

*'I shall not surrender
my Jhansi'*



In the end, a fierce battle between the two in Gwalior made the queen's horse too tired. As a result, the horse stopped in order to cross a stream. In the meantime, an English soldier grievously wounded the queen. The queen proved herself to be a true warrior and killed the soldier however, and did not surrender. Unfortunately, she was unable to survive the wounds but fought bravely till her last breath. John Latimer, a member of the Central India Field Force himself, admitted that 'She played for a high game, and even when she found she had losing cards did not despair, but looked defiance to the last' and that she 'died with a heroism worthy of a better cause'. As an Indian and a woman, I am proud of the tenacity, sacrifice and courage to not conform to society's standards of Queen Laxmbai.



*Fight for
freedom*



She declared that "As long as there is a drop of blood in my body and I have a sword in my hand, no foreigner will be able to dare to set foot on the holy land of Jhansi. Although Indians lost their first struggle for independence, Rani Lakshmbai sowed such seeds of freedom on the land of India, that it ultimately led to the independence of India. Her battle against British discrimination towards Indian rulers and people and battle for independence is unequalled and a shining example of bravery around the world.

