Rani Lakshmibai: Way Of Life

Born as Manu Bai in 1828 at Varanasi, Rani Lakshmibai was to have a legacy that few women have achieved in the world. She was a darling of her father and had to grow up a lot earlier due to loss of her mother at a very young age. They eventually received the protection of the Marathas who became their guardians.

Manu Bai was a curious and courageous child. Skilled at various forms of fighting, warfare, horse riding and wordplay, she used to compete with best of men in her kingdom. She was also very astute and pretty. She had strong friendship with her friend Nana Sahib who was the son of the reigning Maratha Peshwa.

The rumors of her beauty spread fast and as she turned 14, she was married to Raja Gangadhar Newalkar of Jhansi. It is then she was consecrated with the title of Rani of Jhansi. She bore her only child named Damodar who died at a very young age. To overcome the tragedy the royal couple adopted another child and named him after their lost son. However, another blow was truck to the kingdom as the Maharaja soon fell ill and died.

Looking at the dire straits of Jhansi, Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie announced his ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ which denied the succession of adopted sons. Jhansi was seized by on such grounds.

According to the Policy of Doctrine of Lapse, annexed all those states that did not have a legal heir to the throne. Thus, Lord Dalhousie did not approve of the adoption and wanted to annex Jhansi. Lakshmi Bai was enraged by this but eventually annexed Jhansi. She made a couple of petitions against Lord Dalhousie but all her attempts proved futile.

However, Jhansi and its aggrieved Queen soon got a chance at redemption and reclamation as the revolt of 1857 broke out with the sepoys capturing Delhi and raising the flag of the Mughals again.

Rani would recapture her fort at Jhansi and rule as its empress (on behalf of her young son). She was ably supported by her commander Tantya Tope. Soon, forces lead by General Hugh Rose attacked and captured Jhansi. Rani had to escape with her surviving army and railed the Gwalior Fort with Tantya Tope. The ruler of Gwalior invited to help him and remove Rani from the fort.

A tough battle ensued ending with fatal injury to Rani Jhansi. However, in true spirits of a hero, she asked her follower to light her body before being captured by her enemies. Thus, she was never caught. Her martyrdom has been celebrated throughout literature and continues to be source of singular inspiration for all Indians, male or female, young or old.