INTRODUCTION:

The history of Indian freedom struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one.

Woman’s participation in India’s freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel ‘Malcolm’ and defeated him in Guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channamma of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India Company in the 19th century; 30 years before the “First War of Independence 1857”.

The role played by women in the war of independence of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauban Rani, and Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield. Rani Lakshmi Bai Jhansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid an outstanding example of real patriotism.

Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas and from all walk of life, all castes, religions and communities. Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandi, Vijayalakshmi Pundit and Annie Besant in the 20th century are the named which are remembered even today for their singular contribution both in battlefield and in political field.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The history of Indian freedom struggle can be divided into three stages. First stage was before ‘the First War of Independence 1857’ (The battle of Plassey was in 1757 and it success paved the way to strengthen the political power of British East India Company in India). Unorganized and localized fighting known as Resistance Movement carried through by patriots like Pazhassi Raja; popularly known as the Lion of Kerala (died on 1805) and Veluthampi Dalawa (died on 1809). The 2nd stage was during 1857 to 1919, when the strong feeling and thirst for freedom developed and agitation initiated all over the country against the British East India Company. The 3rd stage was during 1920 to 1947, when organizations were formed national wide and well organized meetings, Sathyagrahas, demonstrations were arranged and launched a series of mass movements – the Non Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement etc. This has developed step by step and unbeaten strength, unity oneness amongst Indians and that lead to independence. The 2nd and 3rd stages are considered the milestones in freedom struggle and let us see the details in brief.

The first war of Independence (1857-58) was the first general agitation against the rule of the British East India Company. The Doctrine of Lapse, issue of cartridges greased with cow and pig fat to Indian soldiers at Meerut ‘triggered the fire’. Further, the introduction of British system of education and a number of social reforms had infuriated a very wide section of the Indian people, soon became a widespread agitation and posed a grave challenge to the British rule. As a result of this agitation the East India Company was brought under the direct rule of British Crown.

Even though the British succeeded in crushing it within a year, it was certainly a popular revolt in which the Indian rulers, the masses and the militia participated so
enthusiastically that it came to be regarded as the First War of Indian Independence. Rani Lakshmibai was the great heroine of the First War of India’s Freedom. She showed the embodiment of patriotism, self respect and heroism. She was the queen of a small state, but the empress of a limitless empire of glory.

Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement (1905): Swadeshi Movement emanated from the partition of Bengal, 1905 and continued up to 1908. It was a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in India through following principles of swadeshi (self-sufficiency). Women joined men to protest this division by boycotting foreign goods and buying only Swadeshi goods, i.e. goods produced in the territory of Bengal. Mrs. Nonibala Devi joined the new Jugantar Party which was dedicated to aggressive movement.

Jalianwala Bagh Massacre (1919): General Dyer’s Jalianwala Bagh massacre followed the strike wave, when an unarmed crowd of 10,000 Baisakhi celebrators was mercilessly attacked with over 1600 rounds of ammunition. Yet, Gandhi continued to advocate cooperation with the British in December 1919, even as the resistance of ordinary Indians continued. The first six months of 1920 saw an even greater level of mass resistance, with no less than 200 strikes taking place involving 1.5 million workers. It was in response to this rising mass revolutionary tide that the leadership of the Congress was forced to confront its conservatism and give a somewhat more militant face to its program. The “non-violent, non-cooperation” movement was thus launched under the stewardship of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru.
Non-cooperation movement launched (1920): Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and took up the demand for self-rule and non-cooperation movement. Sarla Devi, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Susheela Nair, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali are some the women who participated in the non-violent movement. Kasturbai Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, and the women of the Nehru family, Kamla Nehru, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Swarup Rani, also participated in the National Movement, Lado Rani Zutshi and her daughters Manmohini, Shyama and Janak led the movement in Lahore.

Poorna Swaraj declaration by the Congress; Meerut conspiracy case (1929) Mahatma Gandhi later demanded for Poorna Swaraj through nonviolent methods. His call to join the Satyagraha Movement witnessed women getting involved in all his programmes. Some of the important women who played a very active role in the Swadeshi Movement were Dr. Sarojini Naidu, Smt. Urmila Devi, the widowed sister of the Congress leader C. R. Das, wife of C. R. Das, Biamma the mother of Shoukat Ali and Mohmad Ali, leader of All India Khilafat Committee, Durgabai Deshmukh, Smt. S. Ambujammal, Smt. Basanti Devi, and Krishnabai Ram of Madras and so on.

Civil Disobedience and The Dandi Salt March (1930): Gandhiji inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement by conducting the historic Dandi Salt March, where he broke the Salt laws imposed by the British Government. Followed by an encourage of seventy nine ashram inmates, Gandhi embarked on his march from his Sabarmati Ashram on a 200 mile trek to the remote village Dandi that is located on the shores of the Arabian Sea. On 6th April 1930, Gandhi with the accompaniment of seventy nine Satyagrahis violated the Salt Law by picking up a fistful of salt lying on the sea shore.
The Civil Disobedience Movement was an important milestone in the history of Indian independence. The aim of this movement was a complete disobedience of the orders of the British Government. During this movement it was decided that India would celebrate 26th January as ‘Independence Day’ all over the country. On 26th January 1930, meetings were held all over the country and the Congress tri-colour flag was hoisted. The British Government tried to repress the movement and resorted to brutal firing, killing hundreds of people. Thousands were arrested along with Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. But the movement spread to all the four corners of the country. (During this time, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were arrested on the charges of throwing a bomb in the Central Assembly Hall (Which is now Lok Sabha). And they were hanged to death on March 23, 1939). Women too, played an active role in the struggle. Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali and Bhikaji Cama, to name but a few, inspired millions of others to take the first step on the road to emancipation and equality.

The Quit India Movement (1942): In August 1942, the Quit India movement was launched. “I want freedom immediately, this very night before dawn if it can be had. We shall free India or die in the attempt, we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery”, declared the Mahatma, as the British resorted to brutal repression against non-violent satyagrahis. The Quit India resolution, taken against British, directly addressed women “as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom” required sustaining the flame of war. Usha Mehta, a committed patriot set up a radio transmitter, called the “Voice of Freedom” to disseminate the “mantra” of freedom-war. News of protest and arrests, deeds of young nationalists, and Gandhi’s famous “Do or Die” message for the Quit India movement were circulated amongst the masses. Usha Mehta and her brother persisted with their task of broadcasting until
their arrest. These acts proved that British could maintain the empire only at enormous cost due to widespread agitation. Some of the eminent women freedom fighters are Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidu, Madam Cama, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Annie Besant, Arun Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamala Nehru, Vijaylakshmi Pundit, Sucheta Kripalani, Sister Nivedita, The Mother, Meera Ben and Sarla Ben.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The study involved the following objectives.

1. To study the freedom movement in India in general.
2. To study when the men freedom fighter is in prison the women took the charge of freedom struggle.
3. To explore the role played by women freedom fighter in freedom movement of India.
4. To critically evaluate the contribution of women in Indian freedom movement and politics.

**HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:**

The following hypothesis is framed for the present study.

1. The Indian freedom movement would be incomplete without remembering the contributions of women.
2. Woman’s participated in Indian freedom struggle as early as first war of independence 1857.
3. When men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle.

4. The sacrifice made by women of India will occupy the foremost place in Indian freedom movement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study is historical descriptive and analytical one. The study is primarily based on the secondary sources. The secondary source will be used like the books, journals, magazines concerned to the research topic. The research material available in the internet will also be used in the present study. The study is qualitative in nature.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE:

There are number of puranic work on “The Role of Women in Indian Freedom Movement”. Some of the important books and articles will be reviewed as under.

Suruchi Thapar, Bjorkert; 2006, “Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen faces and unheard voices, 1930-42”, has done excellent work on freedom movement in India. Most studies of the role of women in the Indian national movement have concentrated on the contribution made by only a handful of prominent women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani and Annie Besant. Less acknowledged but equally forceful was the participation of hundreds of women at the local level-out in the streets as well as inside their homes. This book, significantly, focuses on the nationalist participation of ordinary middle-class women in India’s freedom movement, especially in the united provinces (Modern Uttar Pradesh). To construct the nationalist narrative of unheard
voices, the author goes beyond conventional sources of history such as official and archival records. Instead, she employs a diverse range of materials including oral narratives, poetry, cartoons, vernacular magazines and private correspondence – in order to let these women speak for themselves.


‘Women and Gandhi’, This book highlighted All India Women’s Movements documents. In this section given a full and systematic account not only of the origin of All India Women Movement and its history as spread over eight successive sessions, and detailed work educational and social service and so forth carried on with such commendable zeal by womanhood in the various Indian provinces and states and also abroad, especially in connection with the Round Table Conference and the labors of the joint parliamentary committee.


1. Chandrakala Padia’s Demystifying gender a step to social equality.
2. Sushila Kausik’s – Women and Political participation.
4. Rashmi Srivastava – The Political Scenario in India and Women’s Role.
5. Sarojini Sharan – Women in Decision making positions in Political system.
6. Sharada Jain – Patterns of women’s participation in Politics, the case of Hariyana.

The important contribution have been made by R. R. Diwakar’s “Karnataka through the ages” and Prof. G. S. Halappa’s “History of Freedom Movement in Karnataka”, Vol-II has done excellent work on freedom movement in Karnataka and role played by women in the freedom struggle of Karnataka in depth.

Shastri, Amita; 1992, During the Algerian struggle for national liberation (1954-1962). Nationalist leaders proudly proclaimed that women, as equal to men, would occupy key positions in the modern state building process in Algeria’s post independence period while this original commitment to shared political power at all levels has been expressly emphasized since Algeria gained independence women’s enjoyment of political rights has been insignificant and progress for women has been largely minimal. The rise of the Islamic movement in the 1980s and the crisis of entire state caused by the fall of oil prices have added pressure to maintain the traditional position of women in the home. Other factors that have inhibited women’s emancipation in Algeria are also analyzed.

Geraldine Forbes (1996), Cambridge University Press: “Women in Modern India”, IV Volume; In this book author have used a wide range of material produced by feminist scholars, as well as his own notes from years of researching women’s history in India. He has been an active participant in the discovery and preservation of women’s records and he has read through some private collections which he fear no longer exist. His object is to privilege women’s own accounts so he focusing throughout most of this book on women who were literate that makes them by their small numbers an elite. He begin this work with the male former’s in nineteenth
century India and he has chosen to proceed in this way because patriarchal / systems offer women few opportunities until men decide it is time for change, he acknowledge the British as sparking this change. Many of the reforms they proposed had little to do with the deepest needs of the society. However, education was one of the items on the reform agenda that contributed to the emancipation of women.

Dr. (Mrs) Rajalakshmi – 1940 “The Political Behavior of Women in Tamil Nadu”, Inter India Publication’s New Delhi: The aim of this study is attempt to evaluate factors relevant to women’s participation in the political elite. The study is focused mainly in Indian politics generally, and state of Tamil Nadu particularly in the period which runs from the first granting of the limited franchise to women to the present state.

History of Karnataka by H.V. Srinivas Murthy and R. Ramakrishnan has failed to emphasis the role of the women in the freedom struggle of Karnataka. On the country a general review made of the freedom struggle of Karnataka to add more information to this subject the present work has been undertaken.

M. G. Agrawal, “Freedom Fighters of India”, (In four volumes). This multivolume illuminates the role played by the freedom fighters during the freedom struggle. In fact, besides majority community and all minorities have played important role in freedom struggle, Dalit leaders equally played important role in 1857. These books highlight the contribution of people from all sections of society in the freedom movement during Indian freedom. This is an attempt to draw upon their remembrance of the freedom struggle. Efforts have been made to include freedom fighters from various regions. The reminiscences of these unsung heroes reveal deep dedication and spirit with which they fought against the atrocities of the British
Regime risking their life and profession. In the volume-IV, we can study about women who participated in the freedom struggle and made rich contribution in various ways. Some of them imprisoned, fined and suffered for freedom movement, and their contribution cannot be overlooked. The great contribution of these ladies should be brought to the knowledge of the present generation.

It is interesting and at the same time enriching the ideas, we have a book on “Women Freedom Fighters in Karnataka” written by Sarojini Shintri and K. Raghavendrarao only for the purpose of review, undoubtedly, this work sets a premise for the role of women in the freedom struggle and provides some details of about 27 women freedom fighters who belong to both pre-Gandhian era and Gandhian era of freedom fight. It is very good literary work on women freedom fighters in Karnataka. But unfortunately fails to cover very large number of women who have taken part in the freedom struggle. Therefore, it is a pointer to our review that the women freedom fighters in Karnataka is very comprehensive than accepted from the above work.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhayay – 1983, “Indian Women’s Battle from Freedom”, published by Abhinav Publication’s, New Delhi. The author has tried to describe here the pages of this book in some detail, the women at work at different periods at various levels through organizational structures, institutions above all through a strong purposeful movement. While it did not take on a political label or profess any socio-political economic ideology, it nevertheless got constituted into a powerful national stream and poured its strength into the main national tide.

The emergence of a concise authentic national women’s movement from the twenties with its chief contour’s projections and thrusts has been traced in this book and developed mainly through the all India women’s conference, partly because it
was earliest national body of women which funneled women’s aspirations, plans, projects and focused its achievements and failures, partly because she was amongst the founder’s of the conference and was closely involved in its growth over several decades and deeply absorbed in its affairs. She can therefore track the events scrupulously avoided making it a personal narrative basing instead every detail on records, so that the story is kept objective and historically correct.

Bharati Ray, “Essay’s on Indian Women”, (Ed.), published by Oxford University Press, Delhi – this book contained the following articles

1. Shekhar. B. and Yopadhyay’s ‘Caste, widow, remarriage and the reforms of popular culture in colonial Bengal’.
2. Prem Chandan’s – “Popular perception’s of widow – remarriage in Hariyana”.

Geraldine Hancock Forbes, “Women in Modern India”, Volume-4. In a sympathetic and comprehensive study of Indian women, Geraldine Forbes considers their recent history from the nineteenth century under colonial rule, to the twentieth century after independence.

The “Swatantrya Sangramade Smritigalu”, Vol. I, II and III by Dr. Suryanath Kamat have greatly the role of men in the freedom struggle and very little importance
has been given to the role of women. Hence to highlight the role of women in India and Karnataka this work has been undertaken.

Manmohan Kaur: “Women in India’s Freedom Struggle”, Sterling Publisher’s – New Delhi, 1985, the book cover’s women’s of India in freedom struggle from 1857 to 1947 a period of 90 years. It begins with 1857 when the first attempt of freedom was made, and ends with 1947 when India attained independence.

O.P. Ralhan, “Indian Women through Ages”, Vol. 5, Eminent Indian Women in Politics, Anmol Publications – New Delhi, 1995. The theme in this volumes deals with the socio-economic conditions of Indian women who played a most significant role in the evolution of our society, she acted as a daughter a sister a wife a mother and last but not the least a daughter in law, and enhanced the prestige of domestic environments with the dawn of independence her mental horizon has been greatly enhanced by affording her equal opportunity of receiving education in schools and colleges she defies the existing social customs which curb her personality. An attempt has been made to highlight the role of Indian women from ancient period to modern times and march towards progress in every sphere of life in present day India.

“Karnataka Rajakiya Mahile” written by Smt. Sharada Rajshekhar has described the role of women in the freedom struggle. But the information regarding the Karnataka women is limited to this list and also “Swatantrya Sangramdalli Namma Veera Vaniteyaru” written by Kamala Sampalli has confined the subject matter to limited heroic women of Karnataka but one should not forget the heroic activities of innumerable women during the freedom struggle.

Tirth Mandal, “The Women Revolutionaries of Bengal (1905-1935)”, Minerva Publications India, 1991. In this present study an attempt has been made to document the role of women revolutionaries in the Indian freedom struggle. Specifically, the study thus light on the women of Bengal who participated in the armed struggle for India’s freedom. The Bengali women led some revolutionary actions. In addition, worked to educate, inspire organize and prepare revolutionary activities.

P. N. Chopra - “Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle”, Published by Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1975. This book has been prepared and issued as a part of the observance of the international women’s year. It sets out briefly the heroic role played by Indian women in India’s struggle for freedom.

From the analysis of the above works it become’s imperative that no exclusive book has been deft exclusively for the “The Role of Women in Indian Freedom Movement (1857-1947)”. It is in this context the present study intends to bridge the gap in the available literature by undertaking the present study.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

The research design is framed as under:

Chapter - I: Deals with “Role of Women in First War of Independence”. This chapter deals women’s participation in India’s freedom struggle from as early as in 1817. Bhimbai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and
defeated him in guerila warfare; many woman including Rani Channamma of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazarat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India Company in the 19th century: the role played by women in the war of independence of 1857 was creditable and invited the adoniration even leader’s of the revolt. Rani of Ramagarh, Rani Zindankaur, Rani Tacebai, Baizabai, Chauhan Rani, and Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield.

Rani Laxmibai of Jnansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid on outstanding example of real patriotism. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas and from all walk of life, all castes religions and communities.

Chapter – II: Explains “Women Participation in Swadeshi Movement”. Swadeshi Movement emanated from the partition of Bengal 1905 and continued up to 1908. It was a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in India through following principles of Swadeshi, women joined men to protest this division by boycotting foreign goods and buying only Swadeshi goods i.e. goods produced in the territory of Bengal. Mrs. Nonibala Devi joined the new Jugantar party which was dedicated to aggressive movement. The non-violent noncooperation movement was thus launched under the stewardship of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru.

Chapter – III: Deals with “Women Role in Non-Cooperation Movement”. Mahatma Gandhiji returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and took up the demand for self-rule and non-cooperation movement. Saraladevi, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Susheela Nair, Rajkumari Amrut Kaur, Sucheta Krapalani and Aruna Asaf Ali are some the women who participated in the non-violent movement. Kasturba Gandhi the
wife of Mahatma Gandhi and the women of Nehru family, Kamala Nehru, Vijayalaxmi Pandit and Swarup Rani also participated in the national movement. Lado Rani Zutshi and her daughters Manmohini, Shyama and Janak led the movement in Lahore.

**Chapter – IV:** Deals with “**Women Participation in Civil Disobedience and Dandi Salt Movement**”. Gandhiji inaugurated the civil disobedience movement by conducting the historic Dandi Salt March, where he broke the salt laws imposed by the British Government followed by an encourage of seventy nine ashram inmates, Gandhi embarked on his march from his Sabarmati Ashram on a 200 mile trek to the remote village Dandi that is located on the shores of the Arabian sea. On 6th April 1930, Gandhi with the accompaniment of seventy nine satyagrahis violated the salt law by picking up a fistful of salt lying on the sea shore. During this time women played an active role in the struggle. Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali and Bhikaji Cama, to name but a few inspired millions of others to take the first step on the road to emancipation and equality.

**Chapter – V:** Deals with “**The Role of Women in Quit India Movement**”. In August 1942, the Quit India Movement was launched. The Britisher’s resorted to brutal repression against non-violent Satyagrahis. The Quit India resolution taken against British, directly addressed women “as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom” required to sustain the flame of war.

Usha Mehata, a committed patriot set up a radio transmitter, called the “Voice of Freedom” to disseminate the “mantra” of freedom war. News of protest and arrests, deeds of young nationalist and Gandjiji’s famous “Do or Die” message for the Quit India Movement were circulated amongst the masses. Usha Mehta and her brother
persisted with their task of broadcasting until their arrest. These acts proved that the British could maintain the empire only at enormous cost due to widespread agitation.

Chapter – VI: Explains “The Contribution of Women in Freedom Movement at State of Karnataka”. The great women’s names have gone down in history of their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India a long one. There are endless number of women who daringly fought for India’s freedom with their true spirit and undaunted courage and had faced various tortures, exploitations and worships to earn us freedom that we enjoy today in our motherland India. It is very difficult task list out all women freedom fighters and equally difficult to segregate a few amongst them. Few of them in national level are Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidu, Madam Cama, Begam Hazrat Mahal, Anni Besant, Arun Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamala Neharu, Vijayalaxmi Pandit etc. In Karnataka, Kitturu Rani Channamma, Belavadi Mallamma, Rani Abbakka, Mata Tapaswini, Kamadevi Chatopadhya, Suguna Karnad Desai, Ambakka Baligar and so on, more than 400 women’s were participated in freedom struggle.

Chapter – VII: Deals the Summary and Conclusions.
CHAPTER - I

ROLE OF WOMEN IN FIRST WAR OF INDIA’S INDEPENDENCE (1857-58)

The upheaval 1857 – 58 was the first organized armed attempt by the Indians to free themselves from the political grip of the English. The period was one of great tribulation for the Indians and the English alike, because the fate of both experienced such convulsions which were etched in the history of the country. The British emerged victorious, but the Indians gained too because the movement became a symbol of strength and sacrifice for the subsequent generations.

In the decade preceding the outbreak the political map of India was radically changed. Lord Dalhousie had intensified the process of annexation through a vigorous application of the policy of ‘lapse’. The years of his regime (1848-56) saw the absorption of nothing less than eight States which meant that a quarter million square miles of territory was added to the East India Company’s territorial limits.

The period also witnessed the missionary activities against early marriage, purdah system, the passing of the Widow Re-marriage Bill in 1856, activities of some English officers engaged in proselytizing, the introduction of railways, telegraph and the greased cartridges.

The atmosphere of the country and especially of northern India was clouded with vague suspicions. The people felt confirmed in their faith that the British authorities were not satisfied with mere annexation of the States but wanted to interfere in their religious affairs and end the caste system.
The first signs of unrest were felt in the first quarter of the year 1857 when the sepoys Berhampore (five miles east of Nowgong), Barrackpopre and Ambala resorted to incendiaries. The Indian Regiments were disbanded and the culprits punished. This, however, did not quiet the situation and proved only a prelude to the open rebellion which followed in May.

The leaders of the first war of independence were both men and women, most important amongst the latter being Begum Hazarat Mahal, Rani Mahal, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Ramgarh and Rani Tace Bai. Some of them led troops to the battlefield and fought; while others accepted the sufferings and privation, imprisonment and death.

It was on April 24, 1857, that C. Smyth, Commandant, 3rd Light Cavalry, ordered a parade to test the loyalty of the soldiers, at Meerut. Out of ninety sepoys present, 85 refused to accept new cartridges. As a result they were court-martialled and was sentenced to varying terms imprisonment extending up to 10 years.

The Sentence thus passed was announced on May 9, 1857, in the presence of a gathering with an aim to create a consternation and fear. The sepoys were stripped of their uniforms and then were handed over to the smiths for fastening shackles round their arms and legs.¹ The sight might have been picturesque for the English Commander but the whole affair was distasteful to the Indians assembled. “There was a good deal of murmuring in your ranks”. Says Gough, “and had it not been for the presence of the British troops it is impossible to say what might not have taken place.”²
Later in the evening the ‘women of bazar’ jeered at the sepoys. “Your brethren have been ornamented with these anklets and incarcerated and for what? Because they would not swerve from their creed and you cowards as you are sit still indifferent to your fate. If you have an atom of manhood in you, go and release them.”

The taunts inflamed their hearts. The spark which fell from female lips ignited it at once and the night of the May 10, 1857, saw the commencement of a tragedy never before witnessed since India passed under British sway. The flames of free which broke out at Meerut, on May 10, spread rapidly over a large part of northern India.

**BEGUM HAZARAT MAHAL**

While the women of Meerut were partly instrumental, in accelerating action on the part of sepoys, conditions in Lucknow, a place not very far away from Meerut, were inspiring Begum Hazrat Mahal to take up the leadership.

Hazarat Mahal was dancing girl and later became an acknowledged wife of King Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh by ‘Motah’. The annexation of Oudh which was completed in 1856 came as a heavy blow to the royal family, chiefs and the people. Hazarat Mahal discontented as she was, decided to stay back in Lucknow, while the deposed king went to Calcutta and made his abode there.

The queen mother, however, could not bear this injustice and left for England. “An aged queen brought up in all the pomp and luxury of the East, the soles of whose feet were scarcely allowed to tread the ground, laying aside the prejudices of travel, and under taking a journey of some ten thousand miles, appealed to the people of England for justice.” Her efforts bore no fruit.
As a consequence of the absorption of Oudh in to British territory, as many as 60,000 people were thrown out of employment. Artisans and craftsmen lost their only means of livelihood. Another factor which caused annoyance was that Jackson, the Resident at Lucknow, had converted Chatar Manzil, a place for the royal family, into his residence. Qadim Rasul, a building of sanctity, was converted into a storehouse. Added to these causes were: (a) new revenue settlements did not provide any relief which, therefore, caused frustration; (b) judicial system remained cumbersome, expensive and lengthy; (c) some of the old taxes though abolished were replaced by the new; (d) the payment of pensions, of according to the pension list, prepared at the time of annexation, was unduly delayed.

In the early part of April, Dr. Wells, a British medical officer in Lucknow, tested the quality of medicine by applying the bottle to his mouth before administering to patients. This was disliked by the soldiers and they refused to take it lest ‘the taint of a Christian’ should degrade their caste. The complaint went up to the Commandant of 48 Native Infantry who reconciled the excited soldiers. That night the doctor’s bungalow was destroyed by fire. The culprit was untraced. After a couple of days a number of huts of the 13th Regiment were burnt under mysterious circumstance.

The wounds received as a result of absorption of Oudh were still fresh when rebellion broke out at Meerut on May 10, 1857. The injury caused by annexation was combined with the opportunity afforded by the outbreak at Meerut and people with a hope to establish their own rule lent their support to the rebel cause, and the banner of revolt was raised in Lucknow on May 30, 1857.
The revolution spread rapidly to other towns of Oudh and the rebels were successful in establishing their authority in many places one after another. Consequently by the middle of June, the British regime in this province lay prostrate. Lucknow was the only place where the English did not leave the Residency building and faced the rebels till they were able to regain their lost power.

Hazrat Mahal was an influential lady and was the primary figure in bringing about this insurrection. “She has excited all Oudh,” said Russell “to take up the interests for her son and the chiefs have sworn to be faithful to him.”5 The boy’s name was Birjis Qadir who was then eleven years old.

Hazrat Mahal who became the regent queen exercised all the authority. She ruled the State diplomatically and exhibited qualities of good leadership and statesmanship. The high offices in the State were distributed between the Hindus and Muslims. She also honoured brave soldiers.

Hazarat Mahal Begum was perhaps not fated to rule the state for a long time. In September 1857 came the news of the defeat of the rebels in Delhi which was not only discouraging but was also ruinous for her designs. Added to this was the arrival of Outram and Havelock from Kanpur to relieve the British Garrison in the Residency of Lucknow. After a few encounters with the rebels Outram was able to occupy Alam Bagh on September 23, 1857, and finally reached the besieged Garrison on September 25.

The victory of the English in Kanpur was another setback to her plans. But nothing deterred her from the path she had chosen. The Begum kept up the spirit and
held Durbars. One of her ideas was to cause her own death by taking poison instead of becoming a prisoner of the English.

In the month of November, Sir Colin Campbell, Commander – in – Chief of the British Forces, along with a small reinforcement arrived at Lucknow. The Begum gave a tough fight. Her soldiers became panicky and began to run away. The rebels also became disrespectful to her. The difficult situation made her doubtful of the outcome of the struggle. The English Commander was able escort the besieged Garrison out of the Residency to Alam Bagh.

The rebels again became active in Kanpur and their activities compelled Campbell to retrace his steps. This move of the English helped the Indian troops to pick up courage again. The Begum took this opportunity and ordered for the occupation of Banaras and Allahabad. She also sent instructions to Nazims and Taulkadars to march on Azamgarh and Jaunpur (Dist. of Uttar Pradesh). She called a meeting of the chiefs on December 22, 1857 and criticized the leaders for not exhibiting courage. She denounced them for their indifference and callousness. The Begum is reported to have complained, “Great things were promised from all powerful Delhi and my heart used to be gladdened by the communications. I used to receive from that city but soon the king had been dispossessed and his army scattered. The English have brought over the Sikhs and Rajahs, and communications are cut off. The Nana has been vanquished, Lucknow is endangered what is to be done? The whole army is in Lucknow, but it is without courage. Why does it not attack Alam Bagh? Is it waiting for the English to be reinforced and Lucknow to be surrounded? How much longer am I to pay the sepoys for doing nothing? Answer me now, and if you won’t fight, I shall negotiate with the English to spare my life.” She tried to
encourage the soldiers and is reported to have appeared on the battlefield on February 25, 1858, mounted on an elephant. Alam Bagh was vigorously attacked by a force sometimes led by Maulvi Ahmedula Shah and at times by the Begum in person.

Russell observes thus. “Begum declares undying war against us; and in the circumstances of the annexation of the kingdom the concealment of the suppression of the treaty, the apparent ingratitude to the family for money lent and aid given at most critical a time has many grounds for her indignant rhetoric.”

It was on March 2, 1858, that the British started operation against Lucknow with a strong force of thirty thousand under the command of Sir Colin Campbell and Jung Bahadur (Nepal). The British forces occupied one place after another till the rebels found their positions precarious and decided to evacuate. In the Central Court, Lucknow, alone 860 defenders became the victims of this battle.

Hazarat Mahal “never lost heart and moved among her men with spirit that deserved better success”. She went about in the battlefield inspiring her troops. By March 18, 1858 all the strong points in Lucknow were in the hands of the English. But “a powerful force probably inspired by the Begum held Musabagh, a palace in Lucknow, till the 19th March 1858”.

Later the Begum reinforced Maulvi Ahmedula Shah in his attack on Shahjahanpur. On October 1, 1858, she issued instructions to the troops in a long letter, directing them the line of attack. “This document”, wrote the Chief Commissioner, “appears to be genuine and many of the movements ordered have been made and failed. She wrote: Imtizamood Dowlah is requested to concentrate a sufficient force including artillery for the defense of Pilibheet on the Bheera and
Jugadpur roads, the leaders to be Enayat Ali Khan”.\textsuperscript{10} She not only issued instructions but also led the troops to the battlefield. Sarfras Begum writing to Akhtar Mahal, wife of Wajid Ali who was at Calcutta, made mention of Hazrat Mahal thus: “I did not know Hazrat Mahal was such a brave lady. Seated on an elephant she led her troops against the English without any fear. Alam Bagh was the scene of a pitched battle. Ahmedula Shah joined Hazrat Mahal and they fought with velour and courage but luck did not favour them”.\textsuperscript{11}

Another Begum Sayda wrote to Wajid Ali thus: “Hazrat Mahal showed such courage that the enemy was terrified. She turned out to be very daring. She has brought name to the Sultan Alam. Under adverse circumstances the Begum had to escape to Nepal with her followers and her son Birijs Qadir. The Nepalese authorities were hesitant to give asylum to the rebels. The Nepal Government in a strongly worded letter on January 15, 1859, wrote that if she was to honour the treaty with the British Government the rebels must be surrendered to that government. And therefore, “If you should remain or seek an asylum within my territory and frontier, the Gorkha troops will most certainly, in pursuance of the treaty agreed upon by both the high States, attack and make war on you. And be it known that the Nepal State will neither assist nor show mercy to, nor permit to remain in its territories of within its frontiers to those who have been so faithless and ungrateful as to do mischief and raise animosity and insurrection against their master.

These threats, however, were all in vain as the Begum refused to surrender to the foreign Government. The Nepalese authorities had to change the decision and asylum was given to her on the conditions that she will not communicate with the rebel leaders or with their troops or with the people of India.
She faced many difficulties in Nepal. Only women and boys under 12 were allowed to stay in her camp. The lieutenant in charge of her at Noakote (Nepal) observed the Begum complaining thus: “The Gorkhas have reduced me to dust, they have joined the British, they have neither assisted my troops nor allowed them to remain in the country, neither have they allowed me to join them.” When the Prime Minister of Nepal proclaimed in the rebels’ camps the Governor – General’s terms and invited them to surrender, the Begum said, “They would sooner die than surrender”.

The British authorities offered her the terms that “The Begum Hazrat Mahal will receive all the consideration which is due to her as a woman and member of a royal house. But political powers she shall never have, and she will do wisely to secure by prompt submission a generous treatment and an honorable position for the rest of her life”. It was further added that “The rebel leaders must submit themselves to the mercy and the generosity of the Government unconditionally, their lives and honor being safe, if they have not taken part in the murder of the British subjects. This applies to all from Begum down to those of the lowest rank amongst them”.

The Begum did not agree to these terms as she was not prepared to see herself deprived of all political powers, though it may be said that there might have been a remote fear in her mind about revengeful treatment from the British as it was alleged in some quarters that she was a party to the murder of Europeans. Instead of surrendering she asked for armed assistance from the Nepalese authorities for the purpose of making conquest of the British Province.

After the mutiny was quelled, the Queen of England issued a proclamation to appease the people. She promised to respect the agreements entered into by the
Company and also to respect the religious rites, etc. But it did not receive an unqualified success. Begum Hazrat Mahal issued a counter proclamation challenging the truth and sincerity of the promises made by the British Queen in the proclamation. She warned the people not to have faith in these promises “for it is the unvarying custom of the English never to forgive a fault be it great or small”.  

She condemned the article relating to agreement and contracts and asserted that there was nothing new in them. “The Company professed to treat the chief of Bharatpur as a son, and then took his territory; the chief of Lahore was carried off to London and it has not fallen to his lot to return”.  

The Begum dealt with each article in detail and uncovered the lies in it. She did not surrender to the British authorities, so, she was refused a pension. Nepal Government, however, allowed her a pension of Mohri Rs. 400 a month. The Begum tried to come back to India in 1877 but orders were issued, whereby any request made by either Birjis Qudir and his mother who, or was, a very clever and designing woman, should not be allowed to visit British India. The Government of India clearly explained that if they did enter the territories of the British Government they would on no consideration receive any assistance or allowance from Government and would be required to be under the surveillance of the magistrate of the district in which they might take up residence. As a result of the attitude of British government she could not come to India and hence had to reside in Nepal permanently. Thus the Begum died for the great cause in exile, in 1879, in a land foreign to her.  

There were other women who laid their lives in the battlefield but whose names still remain unknown. Gordon Alexandra observes; “Among the slain at
Sikendra Bagh there were a few negresses. They fought like wild cats and it was not till after they were killed that their sex was even suspected.  

Forbes Mitchell makes mention of a woman who was shot at Sikendra Bagh. She was armed with a heavy old pattern piston. Seated on the pipal tree the killed half a dozen people. Russell also discovered a woman few days after the battle. She was dead but near her body was an enormous mine.

In Delhi there was another woman who became famous under the name, Maid of Delhi. She would go to the battlefield in a Sawar’s uniform and was reported to have been worse than five sepoys in the battlefield. Saddiq – Uli Akhabar (news paper) reported that she had been given a horse by the king.

RANI LAKSHMI BAI OF JHANSI

While Hazarat Mahal was busy in exterminating the British from Oudh, Jhansi gave a quick response to the rebel’s cause. On June 5, 1857, there was an open rebellion at Jhansi. Jhansi was a small Maratha State but its geographical location was strategically important. It could serve as a nerve centre for the Central Indian States and this consideration prompted Dalhousie to hasten its annexation in 1854.

The management of the state, till it became British territory, was with Gangadhar Rao. He had an able wife in Rani Lakshmi Bai. She was the daughter of Moropant Tamble who was in the service of Peshwa Chimmji Appa on a monthly salary of rupees fifty. The Rani was born on Noveber 19, 1835, at Banares. She was named Manikarnika but she became known by the name she was given after her marriage, Lakshmi Bai. She lost her mother, Bhagirathi Bai, when she was a child. The burden of binging up rested on the father. She was married at the age of 14 years.
to Gangadhar Rao then 40 years of age. An interesting account of her has been written by John Lang who became her chief consultant after the annexation of Jhansi.

A son was born to Gangadhar Rao and Rani Lakshmi Bai in 1851, but he died after three months. The ruler of Jhansi fell ill in 1853 and an adoption became necessary. He adopted Anand Rao, a five year old boy, who received his new name Danmodar Gangaghar Rao after adoption on December 19, 1853, in the presence of Major Ellis, the assistant Political agent and Major Martin, Commanding the Jhansi Contingent, Gangadhar Rao handed over a letter over a letter to Ellis with the request to get the necessary sanction of the Government of India for this adoption.

Instead of giving approval to the action taken by the Raja the doctrine of ‘lapse’ was put into force by Dalhousie in the case of Jhansi and the decision was conveyed in an official letter to Major Ellis, the Superintendent of Jhansi, dated March 7, 1854. The letter in part reads: “The State which was a tributary and dependent principality held by grant from the British Government has reverted to that government” When Ellis informed Lakshmi Bai, widow of the late Raja, whom Major D. A. Malcolm, the Political Agent described as a lady “who bears a very high character and is much respected by everyone at Jhansi, about the decision of the government she is reported to have said “Meri Jhansi, Nehi Dungi” (I shall not surrender my Jhansi). ¹⁷

By the new terms provided to her, a pension of rupees five thousand per month was fixed for her and she was given a palace at Jhansi for her residence. Rani and her personal female attendants were not amenable to the British Court during their life time. Personal ornaments of the late Maharaja and the balance remaining in the public treasury after closing accounts of the State were considered her private
property. She repudiated these terms and expressed dissatisfaction to Ellis and also requested the Governor-General to allow her a period of 31 days to enable her to represent her case, but the representation was of no avail since the government was averse to revert the decision. The Rani was no ordinary person and as such the irrevocable decision of the government did not help her to lead a life of acceptance and quietude. Instead it aspired her to fight for her rights to represent her case further.

She addressed a ‘Khureetta’, on December 21, 1854, to the Court of Directors reminding them that the right of adoption was by Hindu Law absolute, fixed and indefeasible and this indefeasible right was not transferred to the East India company nor was it lost or forfeited by the ruler of the Jhansi by any breach of treaty or by conquest and it was not acquired by the East India Company. The Rani felt that the adoption was not disputed as Damodar Rao was permitted to succeed to his father’s property – it was the effect of that adoption which she presumed that the government disowned. Lakshmi Bai. Therefore, questioned the justification and legality of the annexation of Jhansi. She, however, held that if it became necessary on grounds of expediency the course followed should have been that of negotiations and agreement and not that of “exercise of the powers without right of the great and strong against the weak and small”.

In the same petition she informed the authorities that the merger of Jhansi was a gross violation and negation of treaties of the Government of India and that the case of Jhansi had created a disquietude among the princes and chiefs of Upper India and they awaited the result of an application submitted by her with great interest because the decision given in case of Jhansi would help them to decide whether they were to have faith or distrust in the British rule.
Over and above, she asserted that “The people of Jhansi did not desire to be made the subject of the East India Company. On the contrary, without a single exception they testified their willingness and desire to remain the subject of your memorialist and her ward”.19

It is evident from this petition that the Rani not only demanded justice for her cause but she also gave an expression to the sentiments of the people in general and to the wavering faith of the chiefs in the English regime in particular, and hence, made it clear that the treatment meted out to her was being viewed with concern.

Since the petition did not bring any tangible results, she sent a mission to England to represent her case which cost her rupees sixty thousand. The Rani did all that was in the power to regain her lost position, but these protests were of no avail. It was like a cry in the wilderness which went unheard and uncared for. Its effect on the mind of the young Rani is described by Forest in these words: “Thus the Maratha Queen tall in stature handsome in person, young energetic, proud and unyielding from that moment indulged the stern passion of anger and revenge”.20

As a mark of her displeasure she had declined the offer of a pension, but after some time she revised her judgment and accepted it. Her rage was further aroused when she was asked to pay the unliquidated debt of her ancestors amounting to ‘Nanashahi’, i.e., thirty – six thousand rupees. Lakshmi Bai protested that these debts were not her debts and were not contracted by her late husband and hence she was not responsible for them. The Deputy Superintendent supported her in his recommendation to the Leuit. Governor, but the government did not yield. She was asked to pay them from the private funds of the Raja made over to her; otherwise she was threatened with a deduction from her monthly pension. Another act of the British
authorities which earned the Rani’s displeasure was the refusal of the advance money to celebrate the sacred thread ceremony of Damodar Rao, unless four sureties for the repayment of the sum were furnished. Such negative attitude of the government towards each of her requests helped her to keep alive the issue of annexation and to look forward for a chance of redress. The Rani was “ready to take any opportunity of gratifying her revenge and being like many other Maratha women of rank, possessed of masculine spirit she was well fitted to carry out her designs, and was ripe when the outbreak occurred in 1857”\textsuperscript{21}

So far the Rani had personal grievances to nurse; but before long an opportunity was provided by the rulers which enabled her to make a common cause with the people of Jhansi who had continued to brood over the injury and the disgrace of annexation. Kaye writes that “She hated the English with the deadliest hatred. And soon she began to cherish new born grievance. For most among these were the killings of cattle by the English.”\textsuperscript{22}

Slaughter of cows was an unknown thing in the Brahmin State, but the British government was unmindful of the religious sentiments of the people. They not only authorized slaughter of the cows but also established slaughter houses. The Rani and the people petitioned against this wrong but it was of no avail. Hence an excuse was given to “increase the fear and religious passions which had been aroused among the sepoys by the question of greased cartridges and to scatter among them the seeds of disloyalty and contention.”\textsuperscript{23}

Still another cause which created dissatisfaction was that the government’s verdict in favour of the two mistresses of the late Gangadhar Rao allowing them to have the rent of village Sumberadah. In may, there was a widespread rumour in Jhansi
as in other places that ground bones were mixed in the flour and that cow’s and pig’s fat had been used for making cartridges for the use of the army.

In the beginning of June 1857, a letter is reported to have been received from the mutineers at Delhi to say that “the whole army of the Bengal Presidency had mutinied and as the Regiment at Jhansi had not done so men composing it were outcaste and had lost their faith”.  

This quickened the passage of revolt and Jhansi witnessed an open rebellion on June 5, 1857. The English had to take shelter in the city fort on June 6. The next day the Rani’s adherents also joined the rebels. They released the prisoners, set fire to the “Kutchery” and murdered all those officers on whomsoever they were able to lay their hands. The rebels also attacked between the besiegers and the besieged till the night of June 6, when the troops retired and the Rani’s men kept guard on the fort.

The following morning three persons Messrs Scot. Purcells and Andrews were sent from the English Camp disguised as Indians with a view to obtaining help from the Rani. All the three of them were murdered. Andrews is reported to have been killed by a servant of the Rani at the palace door. The same night rebels were successful in getting some guns and men and the fort was again attacked on the morning of June 8, with added strength and renewed energy. The English cold not hold on any longer and thus surrendered on a promise that they would be allowed to leave Jhansi unmolested. But as soon as they came out they were seized and taken to Jokham Bagh where all of them, except Mrs. Multov, her two children were murdered.
In the evening a proclamation was made by the rebels; “The people are God’s, the country is the King’s (Padshah) and the two religions govern”.25

The victory of the rebels was followed by a dispute over the possession of Jhansi territory between the Rani and Sadashiv Rao Narain Parowala, a relation of the late Raja. However, Lakshmi Bai was able to get the territory after paying a large sum to the rebels and a proclamation was made. “The people are God’s, the country is Padshah’s and the Raj is Rani Lakshmi Bai’s”. She however, was to govern on behalf of her adopted son.

There are different versions regarding the actual complicity of the Rani in the rebellion. In the official Narrative of the Events, the facts are recorded in the following manner: “Mr. Scott, Head writer in the Deputy Commissioner’s office, who lived near the lines and mixed much with natives and had much better. Information of what was going on, and placed his property in the keeping of a loyal native in the town of Jhansi. He persisted in avowing that he had good reasons to know that a mutiny was intended and that the Rani and the troops were one.”26

The above statement is partly corroborated from the papers relating to the mutiny of 1857 compiled in the intelligence Department of the Government of India. It is stated that about this time one Chatajee, an agent of a Chief, informed Captain Gordon, Deputy Superintendent of Jhansi, that Bhole Nath, adherent visited the Rani’s place and that treachery was intended. However, it is not clear whether these proceedings had the sanction of Lakshmi Bai. It appears that the Rani apprehended danger and so sought permission to keep an armed guard for her protection.
Kaye while referring to her share in the rebellion writes that “with the Maratha instinct she was in danger from the enemies of the English and thus intimated that her interests were identical with our own while she was plotting our over–throw.”\(^{27}\)

In has been mentioned above that the Rani asked permission to keep an armed guard for her protection as she said she was afraid of the enemy of the English. It is interesting to refer here to Skene’s letter who was incharge of Jhansi district at that time. He wrote on May 8, 1857: “I do not think that there is any cause of alarm about this neighborhood”\(^{28}\). This is curious enough to find that while the English were not aware of their enemies, she should have apprehended danger from them. It is clear therefore, that she was familiar with the designs of the rebels and tried to please both the parties. By asking for an armed assistance she showed the rebels on one hand that her interests were identical with them and that she had already started the recruitment or armed men while on the other hand she could tell the British authorities that she had warned them of the danger if the rebels plot was never discovered.

It is an established fact that the Rani was popular and influential. She mentioned in the petition made by her against the annexation that the people of Jhansi wanted her to be the ruler. Sir Huge Rose, who fought against her, while referring to the resistance put up by her soldiers writes: “The reason was sufficiently clear, the people of Jhansi fought for the Queen and the independence of their country. Even after the city had fallen her bounty and liberality rendered her an influential and dangerous adversary.”\(^{29}\) It is unbelievable that a person of her standing and influence should not have been taken into confidence by the rebels while designing the overthrows of the British Government.
Rani’s father, Moropant, was one of the chief instigators of the rebellion in that part of the country. He could not have possibly kept her in the dark about the intending revolt. Her advice and assistance must have been sought by him. The preceding account therefore, nullifies Majumdar’s statement that “Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi not only did not instigate the sepoy mutiny but had nothing to do with their plan or programme. As far as the Rani’s role in the events that led to the massacre of Europeans is concerned, Major Ellis writing to the Secretary to the Government of India on June 26, 1857, i.e. about 18 days after the massacre reported thus: “Sjt. Kirchaff in the Canal Department who arrived here yesterday evening from Mohaba gives an account of the conspiracy of Jhansi and Nowgong mutineers. Sadashiv Narain Rao Parolwala has been declared a rebel at Jhansi by order of the Agent of the Governor-General, Central India, but he has little or no influence there, and it cannot be doubted that the cold – blooded atrocities committed by our troops on the Europeans would not have been perpetrated had the Rani not encouraged them.”

Thornton, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in an official letter informed Captain Bruce, Superintendent of Police at Kanpur on August 18, 1857, that the mutineer sepoys intended to leave Jhansi after they had seized the treasure. It was at the instance of “a Bundelkhand chieftainess, the Rani of Jhansi, wishing to regain power in the district, bribed them with large presents to take of the fort and put all the Europeans to death before them finally departed for Delhi”.

The official report, recorded eight months after the actual occurrence, held the Rani responsible for the murder of English people in Jhansi. It (report) says: “Through the treachery of the Rani the fortress of Jhansi whither the European residents had
fled, on the native troops mutinying fell in to the possession of mutineers and a
general massacre of all Europeans of every age and sex took place”.\(^{31}\)

Thomas Lowe, a medical officer with Sir Huge Rose’s forces, while referring
to his entry in the place at Jhansi writes: “In most of the rooms we found some relics
or other of the unfortunate officers who perished herd in the mutiny. These things
showed that the Rani had not only participated in their murder but had positively
shared in the plunder of their property”.\(^{32}\)

The worst charge was brought against the Rani by Shahab-uddin, Khansama
of Major Skein, who was at Jhansi and moved about the town carrying messages for
and from his master. He was hauled up by the rebels on a couple of occasions but
somehow or other fortune favored him and he was let free. Shahad-ud-Din States: “He
saw Karuk Bijlee (Gun) was put in order by Rani’s order to be used against the
officers and that the town people, mutineer sepoys and Rani’s servants were firing.
One day before the murder of the officers it was proclaimed in the town by the beat of
the drum that the country belonged to the King Rani had the rule and that the officers
will be killed tomorrow.” It was further stated by him that after the massacre of the
Europeans “the Rani, jail daroga and sawars wnt to the pultan and orders t
to free the
prisoners were given”. Shahab – ud – Din’s statement is not corroborated wholly and
seems to have a tinge of fiction at places and as such cannot be taken as the whole
truth.

Madar Bakhsh, another person attached to Gordon, was engaged in helping the
Europeans. He recorded in his statement that he took a letter from his master to Rani.
In this letter Gordon had requested the Rani to get them down from the fort and to
send them to Duttia or Orchha. The letter under reference was handed over to the
Rani’s father who in turn took it to her. She forwarded the same letter to the Risaldar through her lawyer Ajudhia Prashad. Madar Bakhsh later heard from “one of the Rani’s chobdars who had been dismissed” that the Rani sent another messenger named Zabita Khan to the Risaldar apparently with another message. After the return of Ajudhia Prashad she sent a letter to the besieged Europeans, but the contents of this letter were not known to him. Madar Bakhsh further stated that he heard that Rani’s sepoys took Europeans to the parade and killed them.

As against these statements Bhagwan Brahmin who was at that time at Jhansi says that Lal Bahadur subedar and Bakshish Ali, the Jail daroga, brought the Europeans out of the fort after pledging safety to them. It is recorded in his statement, “I did not hear that the Europeans were killed by the order of the Rani.”

Sheikh Hingan, Hookambardar of Captain Gordon, appears to have carried some message to the Rani from his master. He stated that when Gordon heard that the Rani had supplied guns and sepoys to the mutineers, he wrote a letter to the Rani “to say it was her Raj and other gentlemen would go where she liked.” He further stated that Rani sent a message through her servant to the besieged and the contents were to this effect: “What can I do, sepoys have surrounded me, and say I have concealed the gentlemen and that I must get the fort evacuated, and assist them to save myself. I have sent guns and my followers; if you wish to save yourself abandon the fort, no one will injure you”. According to Sheikh Hingan the mutineers promised that the Europeans would be able to leave Jhansi safely.

There is still more evidence which throws further light on the occurrences. A Bengali attached to the Writer’s Establishment of Jhansi Custom Collector’s Office who was in Jhansi during these troubled days and also was ill – treated for having
sympathy with the Europeans states: “The Ranee placed guards at her gate and shut her – self up in her Palace. Captain Gordon sent a message to the Ranee soliciting her assistance at this crisis, but this was refused as the mutineers threatened to put her to death and to set fire to her palace in case of her compliance with Captain Gordon’s request. The Rane’s guards then joined the mutineers.” He further held that three persons Messrs Andrews, Purcell and Scott disguised as Indians went to the Rani for help; but the feint being discovered, they were taken to the palace of the Rani and she did not even agree to honour them with an interview. She sent them to the mutineers. Her words were to the effect. “She had no concern with the English swine.” While referring to the attack on the fort he says that the Rani was threatened with instant assassination provided she refused to side with the rebels. She accordingly consented and supplied them with a reinforcement of 1,000 men and two heavy guns which she had ordered to be dug out of the earth.

As regards the murder of the Europeans, he observed that as soon as the Europeans came out of the fort, they were seized by the rebels and taken to Jokham Bagh and “then commenced the horrid massacre, the dragon of the jail first raising his sword and killing Captain Skein.” Keye, a celebrated historian writes. “I have been informed that none of the Rani’s servants were present at the occasion of the massacre. It seems to have been mainly the work of our old followers. The irregular cavalry issued the bloody mandate and our jail dragon was foremost in the butchery”.

Mrs. Multov who was in the fort with the garrison and was able to escape with the help of an ‘Ayah’ recorded her impression thus, Mr. Skein and Mr. Gordon went to the Ranee and got about 50 or 60 guns and some power and shots and balls and she sent about 50 of her own sepoys to the fort to assist us and about 2 o’clock during the
day they killed the gentleman who was with them and commenced burning the
bungalow and speared Mr. Taylor who belonged to the cavalry, so he galloped his
horse and came to the fort. Soon as the Ranee heard of it she got all her sepoys down
from the fort. Ranee and her sepoys joined with the Regiment In her evidence she also
mentioned that the Europeans agreed to come out of the fort on a solemn promise
from the rebels that their lives would be spared. This promise is reported to have been
countersigned by the Rani. But as soon as they came out of the fort sepoys put their
guard around them.

Mrs Multov further stated. “I went out with ‘Ayah’; they did not take notice of
me. She brought and left me in the Jokham Bagh in those Hindoo graves made like a
house. I remained there about a month. Dowlut Ram came from Saugor, and heard of
me, he came to me that very evening. I sent Dowlut Ram twice to Saugor; he was
cought twice on the road. Those letters came to Jhansi to the Ranee and she was
looking out for me and Dowlut Ram. So Dowlut hid himself and hid me and two
children. It was the Ranee’s order if any one catches us going out of town that she will
give one hundred rupees as a person in those days”.34

Mrs. Multov’s statement is not corroborated fully by any other person. Secondly, she took her abode in Jokham Bagh, a Hindu cemetery. This place was also
the scene of massacre of the English. It is unbelievable that she stayed, in those
troubled days, in a graveyard, a place not very secure, for a month and could not be
discovered by the rebels in spite of the announcement of the reward. So much reliance
cannot be put on her evidence.

Majumdar and Sen seek to support the Rani, s innocence by referring to a
letter written by Martin, on August 20, 1989, to Damodar Rao, Rani’s adopted son.
Martin while refereeing to the occurrence at Jhansi writes. “The poor thing took no part whatever in the massacre of the European residents of Jhansi in June 1857. On the contrary she supplied them with food for two days after they had gone in to the fort – got 100 matchlock men from Kurrua and sent them to assist us.

Rani, s letter written to the British authorities does not make any reference to the help rendered by her to the Englishmen stationed at Jhansi. In fact she writes: “that she could render no aid for want of guns and soldiers as she had only 100 or 50 people engaged in guarding her house.” If the Rani had helped the British in their difficult hour, she would have never forgotten to mention it.

Secondly, Martin’s name does not appear anywhere in the official reports or enquiries nor does it occur in the statements made by various servants in the service of the British officials at Jhansi. The official reports indicate that there were only two persons i.e., Mr. Crawfort and Mrs. Multov who were fortunate to escape from Jhansi.

It is curious that Martin was not even with his compatriots in the fort as is apparent from his letter. In view of the aforesaid facts much weight cannot be given to Martin’s letter.

Sir Robert Hamilton who made enquiries into these events referred to the dispositions of Sepoy Aman Khan of 12 Native Infantry. He says that “his assertions are corroborated by and corroborate those made by others and as far as they go should say entitle up credit.” Aman Khan took service with the Rani after the rebels left for Delhi. He was under death sentence when he made this statement. Aman Khan reported that “the insurgents, previous to the mutiny, did not consult the Rani. He also stated that the mutineer sepoys placing their guns in position threatened all the rest
with immediate death if they refused to join them. Then all went to the palace of the Rani with loaded guns and demanded assistance and supplies. She was obliged to yield and to furnish guns, ammunition and supplies.”

Hamilton did not expressly accuse the Rani of complicity with the rebels. He however, observed that Aman Khan was very reserved in any matter relating to his own regiment and averse to give more than the bare answer. This assertion of Hamilton shows that Aman Khan might have kept back certain information and even this statement may to be the whole truth.

It might appear from the later statements that the Rani was obliged to lend assistance to the rebels. There seems to have been no question of obligation. If she was really faithful to the English she should have left the State and taken refuge with them as was done by the Maharaja of Gwalior whose army had joined the rebels.

Secondly, she could have given proof of her loyalty by helping some of the English people to escape. Two persons, i.e., Mrs. Multov and Mr. Crawfort were able to get out of the grips of the rebels. In neither case she rendered any help. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Rani of Chattapur gave asylum and helped some of the English men to escape.

Thirdly, if the Rani was interested in retaining the goodwill of the British Government, there was no need for to offer to pay a larger sum of money to the rebels than Narain Rao Parlowala in exchange for Jhansi, her lost kingdom.

Fourthly, there is an authentic account available of the first day’s event, i.e., June 5, 1857, relating to the revolt at Jhansi. Captain Gordon, Deputy Superintendent of Jhansi at that time, informed the higher authorities in a letter dated June 6, 1857,
that trouble had started at Jhansi and that the magazine and all the treasure amounting to four and a half lakhs of rupees was seized by the rebels. In this letter Gordon did not make any reference to the help given by the Rani of Jhansi or of the help expected from her. Even though he writes: I have applied to Sumthur and Orchha for assistance. None can be expected from Duttia where the Raja has just died and a state of anarchy prevails. Thus from the very beginning, her conduct as far as her loyalty to the British Government was concerned was doubted.

In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Lakshmi Bai moved in that period in a diplomatic way. For her, main problem was regaining her lost power and status. She, like a shrewd person, watched which way things would take a turn for the better. When she saw the British power dwindling and the sun rising on the rebels, she did not hesitate to join the insurgents openly.

Moreover, the evidence elaborated in the aforesaid pages is based on hearsay. None of these people were in a position to be associated with the Rani’s plans and for that matter with the high officials who were bringing about this insurrection. In the light of this conflicting evidence it is not possible to arrive at a definite conclusion. However, it is not ruled out that the Rani might not have ordered the murder but she accepted the massacre of Europeans as an outcome of the revolt on the part of the sepoys.

Immediately after taking over the reign of Jhansi on June 9, 1857, the Rani issued orders to the chiefs and officials of the State that she was seated on the ‘guddi’ and that they were to carry on business, hitherto. Receipt of such a ‘perwanah’ was reported by an Indian Magistrate of Mauranipur on June 10, 1857. She also started recruiting men from Jhansi. Sepoy Aman Khan says that “after the mutineers left the
station I entered the service of the Ranee on four rupees a month. None of the mutineers remained here – all the muskets left by the mutineers and their uniforms that had been given to the poor people of the station were collected and given by the Ranee to those who entered her service. In these manner 100 men, all from the people of the town were raised by the Ranee. Besides these about 80 men from the Scindias’ Contingent that were disarmed and disbanded at Asseer came in here and were employed by the Ranee”.

This statement is further corroborated by Hingan, Hookambardar of Captain Gordon thus: “The mutineers went away after three days and the Ranee then raised two Companies of Sepoys and gave the command to three mutineers who had remained behind”.35

June 12, 1857, is presumed to be the date on which the Rani wrote her first letter to the Commissioner informing him about the happenings in Jhansi and requesting for help. A second letter was written on June 14, 1857. Some other letters followed later. It is apparent from the ‘parwanah’ issued by the Rani on June 10, that she had chosen the line of action and that her letters to the government were eyewash. This correspondence was a clever piece of diplomacy as the Rani needed time to build up her forces if ever she had to face the formidable foe and that she could safely do by indentifying her interests with the British.

However, the Rani was able to impress upon the Commissioner, Saugor Division, with these letters the sincerity of her action and as such was authorized by him to collect the revenue, to raise police and to do everything in her power to restore order. The Governor – General doubted the sincerity of the Rani and accorded a
conditional approval on the basis of the account supplied by Major Ellis. “Rani did lend assistance to the mutineers and rebels and she gave guns and men”.

Later the Rani raised a body of fourteen thousand men and unearthed the guns which had been concealed by the former Raja and of which British authorities knew nothing. She began to cast cannons, and make ammunitions. The Rani negotiated with the rebel Rajas of Banpur and Shahgarh. She also established a mint of her own. From the evidence of Deokeemunder Sahar, former orderly of the late Lt. Gordon of Jhansi, it appears that the Rani proclaimed in the town that her reign had commenced and that the English Raj was over. She raised her own flag on the fort and assembled the ‘Mahajans’ to present her their ‘nazransas’.

The period, however, was fraught with danger for the Rani, Sadashiv Rao, who failed to get the territory of Jhansi, posed he to be a ruler at Kurrua (a town 30 miles West to Jhansi) on June 13, 1857. He issued a proclamation to the fact: “Maharaja Sadashiv Rao Narain has seated himself on the throne of Jhansi at Kurrua”. This came a challenge the Rani and she sent her forces against him. Sadashiv Rao was defeated and was taken prisoner.

The second enemy she had to face the Rani of Tehree. The latter’s forces took over Mauranipur on August 10, 1857. The Rani of Jhansi suffered reverses in the beginning but in the battle which ensued on October 23, with the Three’s forces, she came out victorious. The Rani of Jhansi then sent a word demanding from the Rani of Tehree either the immediate surrender of Three and orchha or retribution for the loss she had sustained.
Rani Lakshmi Bai wrote to Hamilton again on January 1, 1858, informing him about the battle with Rani Tehree; s troops thereby professing to be loyal to the British government. But it was reported on January 5, 1858, that the “Rani of Jhansi continued to rule over Jhansi, all disaffected and mutineers men that go to Jhansi are kept by the Rani. At this time she had 400 mutineers with her and the rest of the force was composed of the relatives of the surrounding Thakoors. Although the news of the total defeat of the rebels at Kanpur and that of the advancing of the British Forces has been received by the Rani she seems to entertain no fears.” This statement showed the hollowness of her sincerity to the British government.

The letter of the Rani was not acknowledged by Hamilton. This added to her determination to fight. Secondly, it served as a warning to the Rani to be on guard. Combining in herself the qualities of a warrior and a stateswoman she set about performing her duties with speed.

Lakshmi Bai wrote letters to other Rajas and Chiefs “exerting them to save their faith and sacrifice everything for its sake.” She also wrote to the Nana Sahib that “something must be done to cherish the State and afford it protection.” This letter makes it clear that she was in touch with Nana Sahib. Within a short time “she gained a great influence over the heart of her people. It was this influence, this force of character added to a splendid and inspiring courage that enabled her some months later to offer to the English troops under Sir Huge Rose a resistance which made to a less able commander might even have been successful.”

There were several discouraging factors. After the defeat of the Kanpur rebels, came the news of the defeat of the Raja of Banpur. In a letter dated March 13, 1858, the Raja of Banpur wrote, “I, who appeased the English, inevitably fall and your force
cannot face the English, I advise you to save your life as you can”.

Later, on March 16, the Raja of Banpur with 2,500 horses and two guns took refuge in Jhansi. The Rani sent him supplies. Her officers told the military officers that if there should be a fight with the English they must strike and whosoever had no mind to do this, let him at once resign his appointment. By March 1853 she had 15,000 men in her service. The Rani got all the large and small guns which escaped destruction at the time of the annexation, repaired them and had eight new guns manufactured, thus making a total of twenty.

The newswriter writing on March 17 stated: “That Rani’s officers sent ‘Khureeta’ to the officers commanding at Tel Bhat. The officers in rebellion against the English said to the Rani’s officers that “we believing the Rani to be the enemy of the English said took service, with her. We will not fight inside the city walls. Give us guns and we will fight outside the walls. And if it be your object by the “Khureeta’ which you have sent to the English to make peace with them, pay up our arrears and dismiss us. “The Rani, s officers replied: “Rest assures you will be satisfied”.

Later she ordered Rana Bouru Singh of Nirwar who had taken refuge in Jhansi to leave the town as she did not intend to fight the English. The report further adds: “It is believed that although the Rani publicly directed him to go, she in her heart wishes him to remain.”

It was reported on March 18 that the messenger who took the letter to the Agent to the Governor – General returned with a message from him “Let the Rani come hither.” She then sent another letter. “Rani’s mind inclined both ways. To peace and to war. To war from fear of her rebel servants, to peace from the advice of her
other servants.” In fact the Rani was in a dilemma at this critical period. However, she decided to face the enemy.

On March 20, the Rani sent out all her men in her district to repair to the town. The houses near the city wall were vacated. The same day two small guns were placed on the city walls and ammunition was distributed. The next day the city being besieged the Rani and her advisors wrote a “khureeta” to the Agent stating that they were ready to pay obedience to the British Government. Before the ‘Khureeta’ was finished the Rani and Gangadhar Bhaee Singh, one of the prominent rebel leaders in Jhansi, saw some sowars surrounding the town. Firing was ordered. Thus began the historic fight. “The Rani had” writes Ball Charles, “bravely determined to defend herself to the last, nor was there at any time during the continuance to the siege any symptom of weakness or vacillation on her part or that of her personal adherents.”

Sig Huge Rose, a seasoned soldier, held the command of the British forces. The siege began on March 22, Rani’s troops showed undaunted courage and returned shot for shot. Women were noticed working in the batteries and carrying ammunitions. “It was sure,” writes Malleson, “that the Rani had infused some of her lofty spirit into her compatriots. Women and children were seen assisting in repair of the havoc made in the defence by the fire of besiegers and in carrying food and water to the soldiers on duty it seemed a contest between the two races under the conditions unusually favorable to the besieged”.39 The Rani of Jhansi would go to the batteries to rouse the zeal of her soldiers by her presence and her fiery words.

On March 28, 1858, shells falling into the fort blew up five maunds of gun powder, and the building in which it was stored. Forty men were killed. The Rani was much distressed and distracted by his havoc caused by the enemy and did not take
meals till the evening. She took up her quarters in an underground house in the fort. On 29th, 30th and 31st March, much damage was done to the building and a hundred men were killed.

On 31st March, twenty – two thousand men under Tantia Tope at the request of the Rani marched against the British camp before Jhansi. Sir Huge Rose defeated him (Tantia Tope). Tanita Tope’s defeat on the hand came as a rude shock to the Rani and she had to face the enemy with her own resources, while on the other hand it encouraged and raised the morale of the soldiers in Roses camp. The fire was resumind again on 31st April 1858. “Her men hurled at the stormier all sorts of missiles, earthen pots filled with powder, logs of wood and whatever came handy. For a time it appeared like a sheet of fire out of which burst a storm of bullets, round shots and rockets destined for our annihilation. Every inch of ground was contested till the palace was reached. Jhansi was a slaughter – house reeking under the eastern sky.”

The British soldiers were determined to punish the Rani on whose head they thought rested the blood of slain. She was well aware of the punishment, “Not one iota undaunted,” writes Lowe, “prepared a commensurate resistance such as one indeed as would have shed honour and fame upon the name of any princess, whose hands were unstained by the blood of the innocent and unoffending”.

When the Rani realized her weak position thes cleverly escaped with her adopted son under cover of darkness and in the garb of a man. She travelled a distance of twenty – one miles in the company of Afghans who formed her escort. In the morning the fight was made known in the English camp and a pursuit was ordered. Captain Forbes and Lt. Dowker followed with 3rd Light Cavalry and 14 Light Dragon, The fight ensured between the two rival forces. Some forty men of the Rani’s troops
were slain. Lieut. Dowker got severe injuries and had to give up the pursuit. The Rani escaped with four attendants. Lieut Dowker writes: “The Maratha queen was as much at ease galloping a horse as in the zenana listening to her favorite minstrel and stern chase ensued.”

The Rani of Jhansi with sixteen horsemen and one female attendant reached Bhandair on 5th April 1858 and was put up at the Kutchery. She had been fasting for the last three days. Here as they were about to cook meals, information came that the British troops were in pursuit. The Rani and her followers after taking milk started for Koonch and joined Tantia Tope and other rebel leaders.

Jhansi fell but Kalpi became the meeting place of all the rebels. Rao Saheb, the Nawab of Banda, Tantia Tope and the Rani of Jhansi all combined advanced to Koonch, a strategic town on the Jhansi Road, to give fight to the British. During the battle the Rani dressed in man’s attire and armed with a sword and a dagger rode at the head of 50 sewers and 100 matchlock men.

After a series of hard battles the rebels had to evacuate on 23rd May 1858. Huge Rose writes: “While so many drawbacks weakened me, the enemy physically speaking, was unusually strong. They were under three rebel leaders of considerable influence, Rao Sahib, a nephew of Nana Sahib, the Nawab of Banda and the Rani of Jhansi. The high descent of the Rani her unbound liberality to her troops, and retainers and her fortitude which no reverses could shake rendered her an influential and dangerous adversary.”

There were plans of capturing the Rani and for this purpose the Governor – General authorized Hamilton to offer twenty thousand rupees as reward. The English
General thought the work was over, but the Rani would not let him be in peace as long as she lived. Gwalior became the next rebel centre. “The Rani desperate and daring then conceived the plan of marching to Scindia’s capital and taking possession of that stronghold.” “The Rani was a resolute and intrepid woman who infected her troops with her own fearlessness hardihood and carried on the struggle against the English with a coolness and capacity that exorted full and frank admiration from our Generals. She it was, who in the darkest hour of her side’s defeat made the astounding proposition that once more threatened the progress of our arms in India”.

This move came as a surprise and the idea, observes Holmes, was “as original and as daring as that which prompted the memorable seizure of Arcot.” Gwalior fell to the rebels without a blow on June 4th and troops joined the rebels. Friend of India of June 10th, 1958, wrote, “Tantia Tope has been proclaimed Nana, Rao Sahib has acquired some other dignity and the Rani of Jhansi retains all her importance. Thus the Marathas hope to recover their lost glory by eliciting an imposter for a Peshwa and by submitting to a woman stained with every crime.”

Rose retraced his steps on hearing the news. General Napier joined him. On June 16th, both after a hard battle were able to defeat the rebels under Tantia Tope of Morar. Next morning General Smith also came for their help. He attacked the city and met the force led by Rani at Kotach – ki – Sarai. The British forces were able to clear the place of the rebels. The Rani took interest in almost all the phases of the battle. “It is the characteristic of the Rani’s thoroughness and capacity that she went out in person to supervise this important work. Disguised as a man she passed rapidly from post to post until the persistent and deadly fire of Smith’s guns drove in her own artillery.
Col. Sir. R.C. Shakespeare, Agent to the Governor – General wrote, what seems to be a reliable account of the death of the Rani which was told by Damodar Rao and the people. The rebels were in possession of Gwalior for eighteen days. The Rani hearing of the British troops advancing went on the top of the house where she was living and seeing the British troops she descended and mounted her house to start, but European soldiers surrounded her and she received a cut on the left eyebrow, another on the left hand and a ball pierced her right side. The guns of the fort having opened fire, the Rani returned. She fell from her horse as did a female attendant, named Moondar, who had also been wounded near her stomach.

After the English troops returned some of the Rani’s soldiers attended on her and gave her water to drink. However, she could not survive the bullet wound and thus died “the bravest and best military leader of the rebels.” Her corpse was taken to a garden under the fort Damodar Rao performed some ceremonies and burned the body in a stack of grass.

The Rani’s determined fight and death in the battlefield is an inspiration for all times to come. Malleson record: “Whatever her faults in British eyes may have been, her countrymen will ever remember that she was driven by ill – treatment into rebellion, she lived and died for her country.”

**RANI OF RAMGARH**

Rani of Ramgarh was another who participated in the outbreak of 1857 – 58. Ramgarh is a small village in Dinderi Tehsil of Mandala District in Madhya Pradesh. Raja Lachman Singh, the last ruler died in 1850 leaving his only son Vikarmjit as heir. The latter had not ruled the state for more than a few days when it was discovered that he was mentally unsound.
The British authorities, true to their policy of increasing their territorial limits took over the management of the estate and appointed their own Tehsildar. A pension was, however, fixed for the Raja and his family. The Rani protested against this measure, but it was in vain.

The outbreak in Central India was a signal for the Rani to rise to the occasion and redress her grievances. Ramgarh became the fountainhead of the revolt in Mandala District in July 1857, and the Rani of Ramgarh its originator. She removed the Tehsildar and took over the administration. When the Commissioner at Jabalpur came to know about the state of affairs in this area, he ordered her on August 26th, to see the Deputy Collector of Mandala District. She ignored the order and started preparations to face the British. The Rani fortified Ramgarh by erecting barricades and increased her army strength. The Rani also contacted the neighbouring chiefs and zamindars with a view to obtaining help from them.

On April 1, 1858, the British forces advanced towards Ramgarh. She left the fort and led her troops to the battlefield. In an encounter with English troops in front of the town had to bear a heavy loss. Her small force was defeated and she fled from the town. The Rani, however, did not lose courage and retired to the nearby jungles, from where she kept raiding the British camp. The Rani expected help from the Rewah rebels who joined the English. Her position became precarious and her capture became certain. She did not want to be a prisoner of the British and hence borrowed a sword from her companion and plunged it into her own body. On her death – bed she revealed that she had stirred the people to rebellion. The admission on her part showed her honesty and conviction in the sanctity of her cause.
RANI TACE BAI

Tace Bai also followed the example of her sisters in Central India and castigated her allegiance to the British authorities during the out break of 1857 – 58. She, however, did not have the same courage as the Rani of Jhansi and the Rani of Ramgarh. She was daughter of Gopal Rao a direct descendant of Gangadhar Govind, a former Government of Jaloun. In 1842, the state had lapsed to the British Government and Rani Tace Bai, a claimant to the state was sanctioned a pension of twelve thousand rupees per annum.

After the revolt of 1857 – 58 Gurssari chief established himself as the undisputed master of Jaloun District with the exception of parganas Kachhewagarh and Duboh with headquarters at Jaloun. Tantia Tope heading the Scindia’s troops who revolted on September 22nd after the fall of Delhi, reached this place on October 29, 1857. Gursari chief was unable to face Tantia Tope and agreed to surrender. However, another claimant, Tace Bai, put forward her claim. Tantia Tope favoured her and put her soon on the Gaddi with the condition that she acknowledge the Nana and pay a sum of three lakh rupees. Thus she transferred her allegiance.

On April 12, 1858, it was reported that when Tace Bai heard that Jhansi had fallen, she did not stay back to face the English instead, packed up her goods and left Jaloun for Ingumpur advising her followers to go wherever they thought it safe to retire. She is reported to have rendered submission to the British,

Hamilton the Agent to the Governor – General, reported that there was no charge against Tace Bai of ill – treatment of any Europeans or having been guilty of any atrocity. “There is no doubt that she joined the rebel party, set aside the authority of the British Government and cast off her allegiance”.

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As a consequence of her actions the British authorities decided to deport Tace Bao, her son Govind Rao and her husband beyond the territorial limits of Central India. She was also deprived of her pension of twelve thousand rupees. Her jewels worth thirty thousand rupees were sold and the money was credited to the Government treasury.

Tace Bai was deported to Monghyr. The order of the Government of India was conveyed in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal regarding the nature of surveillance to be exercised on her: “She is to be treated with consideration and respect, the surveillance over her is to be sufficiently strict to prevent all hope of escape to check all correspondence with her own country and obviate all chance of successful intrigue”. She remained a prisoner for twelve long years before she was released by the British.

There were several other women in different parts of the country who lent their support to the cause. Their role may not have been significant, yet their contribution to the cause of freedom was of considerable help. For instance, the Thakurani of Budri contributed to the rebels’ funds, Rani Digambar Koer joined the rebels at Gorakhpur, and Rani of Tikari (Gaya) added to the fortification of Tikari.

Former Rani of Jyetpore also took advantage of the opportunity afforded by this uprising. In defiance of the prohibition order issued by the Magistrate, she proceeded to Jyetpore with an armed force and established herself there. The Rani was again addressed by the Magistrate and he informed her that unless she vacated Jyetpore quietly she would not receive her pension of two thousand rupees. Various efforts were made to enable her to leave Jyetpore voluntarily. But she did not pay any
heed to those offers. She was warned that the alternative would be forcible ejection.
She was later expelled from Jyetpore.

Rani Jhindan, who was in Nepal during the disturbances of 1857 – 58, took advantage of the opportunity and wrote letters in cypher to Maharaja of Kashmir which were intercepted and were believed to be genuine. In these letters Maharaja of Kashmir was exhorted to initiate an attack on British territory when Jung Bahadur would simultaneously descend from Nepal and attack Gorakhpur. Rani Jindan also informed the Maharaja of Kashmir of the arrival of Nana Sahib, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Banee Mahadeo and Hindustani sepoys, pleading with and encouraging him to do whatever was possible.

In 1850, Temple, then Commissioner of Lehore, discovered that Megh Singh and Kishan Singh, in Gurdaspur district, usually visited the Maharani in Nepal and had lately used seditious language against the Government. These people were punished. Another person named Jowahar Singh a relative of the Rani Kulwallee, window of Maharaja Kharak Singh, was also found out to have met the Maharani at Nepal. He was ordered to furnish security by the British Government. Rani Jindan was kept under strict surveillance and was neither allowed to come to India nor communicate with anybody in India or with her son in England.

Writing in 1862, Mr. Davies, Secretary to the Punjab Government informed that the national feelings of the Sikhs though repressed and extinguished were likely to be excited by nothing more than the return of the Rani to the Panjab. She was, however, later permitted to write to her son in England. Her son Maharaja Dalip Singh was allowed to visit her in Nepal. He took her to England where she died in 1863.
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24. This statement was made by Sepoy Aman Khan of Native Infantry and was considered Trustworthy by Sir R. Hamilton. (Foreign Political Supplementary Consultation, No. 283 of December 30, 1859).


26. Reference to this fact is also made by (Captain) P.G. Scott in his report thus: “Some days before it (Mutiny) Occurred, Captain Dunlop commanding the Left Wing of the 12th Native Infantry and the station of Jhansi too, sent over to Major Kirkee letters from Major Skene, the Superintendent and Captain Gorden, Deputy Superintendent of Jhansi, informing him that they had learnt from separate sources that one Luckmen Rao, the servant of the Rani of Jhansi, was doing his best to induce the men of 12th to Mutiny. It was not known
whether the Rani authorized these proceedings.” (Forest, G.W., op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 1.).


33. Foreign Political Supplement, No. 284, December 30, 1859.

34. Foreign Political Consultation, No.46/7, July 16, 1858.

35. Foreign Political Supplement, No. 286, December 30, 1859, p. 465.

36. Foreign Political Secret Consultation, No. 355, July 31, 1857.

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