

# **Maharani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi, a Story of Women Regent: India's Precedent Worldwide in Legendary Role of Woman in Politics and Administration**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

India failed to throw the British rule in spite of dreadfully blood-spattered Uprising in the year 1857. But India got some positive impact as well. Emergence of nationalism, establishment of modern communication and transportation, a definite map or political border, enlightenment of western education and thereby renaissance and social as well as religious reforms, these are the foremost positivity of the British rule which are commonly known. But the British rule extended its impact in fostering the re-entrance of women in public sphere including politics too. Politics in the then India was mainly the activities centers around the freedom struggle. The nature of participation in freedom struggle by women, not only as mere participant but also as leader of various movements and the nature of habitual obedience of the people towards women leadership, placed Indian women to such a status which world never perceived before. The period from 1857 to 1947 perceived the birth of women social activists, reformers, participants of freedom struggle (both active and passive), women warriors, women regents, from every corner of our country. In this paper the researcher is going to uphold the history of leadership of a woman regent which is not only glorious in nature but also unique in world's history. Not only India but also the world rarely has produced such exceptional woman leader. The paper also presents the yardstick of true leadership and conception of political status, and after an analytical study of the facts of that woman's leadership, upholds how India was in precedent position in the world in respect of women's political status during the colonial period.

**Key words** --Political Status, Woman Leadership, Freedom Struggle, British Rule, Obedience.

## **Introduction**

Universally the histories, of all civilizations and development, put women and politics as occupying the exclusively different areas of society. Politics was considered as a public activity dominated by men till the beginning of twentieth century as the century received prompt regarding important changes in perspective towards women's role in politics. Feed supplied by U.S.A. for availing presence of women in the political process within their territory and thereby UNO's declaration of international women's year in the year 1975 having stepped several steps towards making accessible political rights to women has unveiled this global dismal picture regarding the state of women in public life especially not attaining of them to the acquisition of decisional power going beyond the ballot box towards local as well as national offices and also wide dispersed ratio between world's women population and woman profile heads public office. It also made this a well-accepted statement that globally right from the developed to the developing countries, women presence in political arena is marginalized except some Nordic countries [1]. The historical lines written for the women profile in top

power position in political field were not indicators of significant status of women in politics in totality. Further the names of the countries who womb such women regents are rare still today. In respect of this India aheads many countries as She gave birth of a woman regent, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the first war of Independence, where every society defines women's work to be performed is the household activity, even the developed society has not been able to alter this role significantly in the present century [2]. Thus India's position regarding status of women as regent and leader was quite prestigious during colonial rule.

## **The concept of political status**

Status simply refers to the position of someone in institutional system's sub-system which is distinguishable from others. 'Status' also can be understood in terms of degree of superiority and inferiority, privileges, advantages and disadvantages. Status is also similar to the performance and participation in the field concern along with the recognition from the community concerned. Similarly the term 'Political Status' indicates availability of political rights and supportive opportunity with the nature of participation as well as performance in political processes. Again political participation can be defined in various ways. Generally it refers to the participation of individuals in the political process and also taking part in deciding common goal of the society. Political participation is largely determined by the socio-political environment. It is easily inferable that political participation is a complex phenomenon. Therefore 'Political Status', which primarily imports from political participation, is complex concept as it has indexed many indicators such as nature of participation, determination as well as faculty of the person engaged, degree of supportiveness of the environment etc. where psychology and the culture prevailing in the concerned society is a strong determinants.

Political status of women in India is furthermore complex as it has endured periodic changes parallel to the changes regarding evolution of civilization along with the expansion of the border line since the Harappa civilization to unified sovereign India. It also indexes its cultural, social, religious and spiritual extents. These also are composite phenomena as have been evolving with the long period of historical development.

## **Methodology**

The present study has employed the method of content analysis here to gather data and cross verified and inferred on the basis of critical analysis of the data sourced from different secondary sources like published news papers, articles and books mainly and other materials also like painting, poem written on the then situation etc. found relevant.

## **The British rule and birth of women Activists**

It is no means to utter that India's today's map much debts to the British rule. The foremost important step was the introduction of western education and thereby renaissance and various social reform movements, which may be called as Hindu revivalism, has a great contribution in fostering the re-entering of women in public sphere. Movements like Brahmosamaj, Aryasamaj, Theosophical Society, Ramkrishna Mission and so on made a distinct contribution towards the welfare of women in all aspects and also bringing them to the public sphere once again, even in politics too (politics refers in those days mainly the activities centre the struggle for freedom). Many women social reformers too made a valuable contribution though indirectly to the Indian freedom movement. Prominent personages were Sunanda, known as Maharani Tapasvini, Pandita Ramabai, Swarn Kumari Devi, Rani

Shrunomoyee, Ramabai Ranade, Francina Sorabji, Rani Lady Harram Singh and others. India also experienced a surprising growth of feminine extremist movement in the then politics of struggle caused by suffering as well as dissatisfaction from the alien rule. Miss Kumudini Mitra was very active during that period while organizing a group of educated Brahmin ladies for maintaining coordination between revolutionary leaders. She preached Suprabhat, a Bengali Magazine propagating the cult of revolution. Punjab also had given birth of woman activist in freedom struggle. Smt. Sushila Devi of Sailkot, used to deliver attacking lectures towards the then Government and exhorted the women to rise to the occasion. Har Devi, wife of Rosanlal, Barrister of Lahore, who was the editor of the magazine namely "the Bharat Bhagini", also joined seditious politics. Women worker of Arya Samaj contributed to the nationalist struggle by means of arising nationalist spirit among the people. Smt. Purani was a prominent activist of Swadeshi movement at that time. Agayavati Devi in Delhi took interest in political activities. Sarala Devi another female freedom fighter used to perform the task necessary for maintaining the link between Punjab and Bengal revolutionaries. Her mother Swarn Kumari was also a Swadeshi. Sarala devi edited "Bharti" through which she advocated Hindu-Muslim Unity. She introduced "Lakshmi Bhandar" in popularizing Swadeshi goods and also opened Arya Samaj Branches for women. She was also the secretary of "Bharat Stri Maha Mandal". Many Indian woman aboard had also made contribution for favouring revolutionary activities. Mrs. Shyamji Krishna Verma, Miss. P. Naraji, Miss. M. Chattopadhyay, Madam B.K. Cama are a few among the many important personages. It is quite worthy to mention the fact that Madam Cama was the first woman who unfolded Indian National Flag in foreign country in front of cross national gathering. Women were also associated with the revolutionary troop like Bina Das, Kalpana Dutta, Pritilata Waddedar, Sunity Choudhury, Saumili Gosh, Shobharana Dutta, Ujjala Devi, Parul Mukherjee, Bahalata Das and so on. Women of Bengal organized "Mahila Karma Samaj" (the ladies' Organization Board of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee) to carry out propaganda and constructive work amongst the women of Bengal, they used to organize meeting. For instance Smt. Indra Parbha Majumdar and Smt. Radu Bibi organized a meeting in response of which common women gave up their foreign ornaments. Smt. Basanti Devi and Urmila Devi were also worthy to be mentioned in this regard [3]. There is no doubt that women's movement in India remained confined to the upper strata of the Indian society [4]. M. K. Gandhi made the common women active participant of India's Struggle for freedom [5]. Gandhi encouraged women from lower segment to participate the national struggle and also received responses satisfactorily from both upper as well as lower strata of Indian society. Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi took the act of leading the women. In other side, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose while he first time formed women troop in Indian National Army i.e. Rane Jhansi Regiment. Before that in 1928 Netaji decided to have uniform women volunteers' march with in men in the procession to inaugurate the annual congress meeting in Calcutta [6]. The nature of feminine assistance got drastic change with the arrival of S.C. Bose. A women camp was started by him in Singapore in the year 1943, to impart training of nursing, social work, drill, weapon training and tactics, map reading. Mrs. Sehgal was an important figure of Indian National Army [7]. It was legendary that women for the first time in the world performed wonderful in such a battle field which was most exploited by the circumstances too. Freedom struggle of India fall among the liberation movement in the world where women had participated in great volume [8]. They had demonstrated bravery, spontaneity. Many Indian intellectuals concluded that the British period made scope for women's increasing participation in public life after a long gap [9]. Mill also justified British rule by referring to women's status [10]. All these histories are actually the histories of glory regarding the remarkable political status (as the then politics was mainly the politics of nationalist struggle) of women because of their enormous and voluntary participation as activists of social as well as nationalist revival.

## **India's history of preeminent leadership by a woman regent**

The period of Sepoy Mutiny created a situation for having leadership from different strata and many of leadership came out to direct the movement to overthrow the British rule. Where scarcity of women in decisional and motivational position is still prevailing worldwide, India was able to birth a woman Regent who is not only a regent but also a leader in true sense due to the then situation. She is none other than Rani Laxmi Bai, the queen of Jhansi. From a lady she became regent as the king of Jhansi nominated her as the heir of his province during his illness before death as their adopted son was not an adult at that time. "it is possible this precipitated the last minute adoption by the dying Raja and he hoped the British Government would allow his widow Laxmibai to administer the state until he comes of age"(the great Indian Leaders). Nomination of women heir is not uncommon to India before that. But Rani became a regent in true sense when the British ruler nominated and handed over the charge of Jhansi to Rani during mutiny period which earlier alienated from her after the death of the king. When sepoys ultimately mutinied on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1857, the British authority was uprooted in Jhansi, the then British Commissioner of Sagan Division, Mr. Frazer appealed to the Rani to hold and administer Jhansi on behalf of the British [11]. Because of the controlling and motivational power of Rani and the influence of Rani to the subjects of Jhansi, the foreign ruler also bounded to think her the best to keep Jhansi calm during the mutiny period. Rani ruled quite ably for about ten months as a representative of the British Government [12]. Making a woman a regent by any foreign invader was quite rare as global history unveils.

### **A brief introduction to Rani**

Satara is a historically significant place in Maharashtra. The ancestors of Rani Laxmi Bai were the people of the village called Vayee just beside the river Krishna. Moropant and Bhagirathi Bai, parents of Rani, were devout and named the Rani as Manikarnika, on her birth in 1835, on the name of a bathing ghat Manikarnika, a ghat at the bank of river Ganges at Varanasi, where believed sins could be washed off. She was affectionately called as Manu. Moropant Tambe was an employee of Chimnooji Appa, brother of Baji Rao-I. In 1818 the British took over the kingdom of Maharashtra from Peshwa Baji Rao and sent to Varanasi. In 1832 Chimnooji Appa died and Peshwa Baji Rao took Moropant into his service. Manu lost her mother and used to be taken by her father with him while in Baji Rao's Palace. Manu, the child Rani, was bright, intelligent, charming, active and brilliant [13]. Rani has been described by her British Lawyer as "a woman of about middle size rather stout but not too stout. Her face must have been every handsome when she was younger and even now it had many charms. The expression was very good and very intelligent. The eyes were particularly fine and nose very delicately shaped" [14]. Manu was married to Maharaja Gangadhar Rao in the Vinayak Temple in Jhansi with all pomp and gaiety and given the name Laxmi. Thus Manu became Maharani Laxmi Bai and later on her skillful administration and reigning made her the Legendary Queen of Jhansi and enumerated glorious golden lines in the history not only of India but also precedent in the world history.

### **Rani as Administrator and Diplomat**

The habitual subordination of the subjects of Jhansi she obtained was because of her dedication, commitment, determination, ability to take lead in unforeseen situation, hard work, utilizing of opportunity or scope, clear vision about the goal, capability of motivating and inspiring others, delegation to her team, sensitivity and management, capability of taking quick decisions. The queen was always concerned for social welfare. Rani personally supervised the troop's parade, inspected the stores and magazines, held meeting with commanders and

discussed with them the latest intelligence about the movement of British troop. In morning she supervised the work of political military officers, she sat her court in afternoon and looked to the administration of the departments of justice, revenue, accounts. She grasped the matter quickly and issued order instantly. Sometimes she wrote her order by herself. She spent time and energy to have books on religion and philosophy. Rani encouraged her women subjects to come out of purdha and to help them in the work of siege [15].

“She rose as early as three in the morning, and after the usual ablution devoted herself to religious meditation until light. Then for three hours she supervised the work in the political and military office; when it was finished she distributed alms to the needy and distressed. She took her meal at midday and wrote 1100 names of Ram which was religious customs, before again appearing in the Court at three. The afternoon was devoted to the administration of the various departments of justice, revenue, and accounts which lasted till sunset. The remaining hours in the evening were spent in listening to reading from religious books. Then she went to sleep after bath and simple dinner” [16].

Rani reigned well and has every aspect to be called as the Joan of Arc of India. Ethics was always been a part of her administration. Rani became regent on request by the British. They receive justice even after flow of injustice to Rani during her ruling. But the British lost their faith on Rani due to the war led situation and they lost most ethical ally and India retrieved rebellious Rani, a legend.

## **Rani and theory building in Leadership**

She exceeded all the fourteen attributes of leadership as very recently discussed in the Oxford Handbook of Leadership in this century. Thus theory building on leadership can be done by analyzing the character of Rani Laxmi Bai and the then facts based on case study method. A very close view of her deeds will lead to new clues in leadership. Thus it can be said that colonial period for India produced such a situational personage which is historically unprecedented, source of research in present days, impetus for theory building relevant to present days and still pioneering to the rest nations.

## **Relevance of the study**

The different plots of history teach us differently. If we, the researchers look at and find out the lessons and go on to make theory on different aspect which yet not done, the field of knowledge may grow faster. The significance is this type of research is that this would be time tested and scientific one and hence would be much more beneficial to them who intend to make these theories into practice.

The present study, intends to uphold the exact pattern regarding leadership, how a good leader can change the society and hold it tight, focused on what should be the characteristics of a leader indeed by exploring the portfolio of the Queen from the History of India's Freedom Struggle. This may be considered as addition to the present theories on Leadership. An extended study on this also may enhance this field more.

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