Rani Lakshmibai, born 19 November 1828 – Jhansi's queen of 1857

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Why in news: 19 November is the birth anniversary of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, one of the foremost leaders of the Revolt of 1857. Her story links three exam favourites – the Doctrine of Lapse, the course of the 1857 revolt in central India, and the INA's women's regiment that carried her name.

Key points

- Early life: born Manikarnika Tambe ('Manu') in Varanasi; 19 November 1828 is the generally accepted date, though some historians give 1835. Her father was Moropant Tambe. She was trained in horse-riding and arms.
- Jhansi: in May 1842 she married Gangadhar Rao Newalkar, the Raja of Jhansi, and became Lakshmibai. Their son, born in 1851, died a few months later. A day before his death in November 1853, the Raja adopted a boy, Anand Rao, renamed Damodar Rao.
- Annexation: Governor-General Dalhousie refused to accept the adopted son as heir and annexed Jhansi under the Doctrine of Lapse. In March 1854 the Rani was given a pension of ₹60,000 a year and asked to leave the fort. (Exam lists often give Jhansi as 1853 – the year of the Raja's death; the order took effect in 1854.) Other States taken under the doctrine: Satara (1848), Sambalpur (1849), Nagpur (1854).
- 1857–58: after the sepoys at Jhansi rose in June 1857, the Rani took over the administration. Sir Hugh Rose besieged Jhansi from 23 March 1858; a relief force under Tatya Tope was beaten on 31 March, and the city fell in early April. She escaped with Damodar Rao to Kalpi, then joined Tatya Tope and Rao Saheb in taking Gwalior. She died fighting at Kotah-ki-Serai near Gwalior on 18 June 1858 (some accounts say 17 June). Rose called her 'the most dangerous of all Indian leaders'.
- Legacy: Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's Hindi poem 'Jhansi ki Rani' made her a household name. The Indian National Army's women's unit, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, was formed in Singapore in 1943 under Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan (later Sahgal). Tamil Nadu parallel: Rani Velu Nachiyar of Sivaganga fought the East India Company and regained Sivaganga in 1780 – about 77 years before 1857.

In the exam: TNPSC – Revolt of 1857 (causes, leaders and centres), Doctrine of Lapse, women in the freedom struggle, Velu Nachiyar; INA. UPSC Prelims – leaders and centres of 1857, annexation policies; Mains GS-I (modern Indian history – 1857, role of women).

Questions

1. Under which policy did Governor-General Dalhousie annex Jhansi after the death of Raja Gangadhar Rao?

A. Subsidiary Alliance
B. Doctrine of Lapse
C. Ring-fence policy
D. Permanent Settlement

2. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment, the women's unit of the Indian National Army named after Rani Lakshmibai, was formed in 1943 at:

A. Rangoon
B. Singapore
C. Tokyo
D. Kuala Lumpur

Answers with explanations

1. **B) Doctrine of Lapse** – Dalhousie refused to recognise the adopted son, Damodar Rao, as heir and annexed Jhansi under the Doctrine of Lapse; in March 1854 the Rani was given a pension of ₹60,000 a year. Satara (1848) was the first State annexed under the doctrine.

2. **B) Singapore** – Subhas Chandra Bose reached Singapore on 2 July 1943 and authorised Lakshmi Swaminathan (later Captain Lakshmi Sahgal) to raise the women's regiment there.

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