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How is the Rani of Jhansi Memorised in the History of the Nineteenth-Century India? Selection of Historical Accounts

Introduction

The article focuses on the representation of the Rani (Queen) of Jhansi, also known as Lakshmi Bai, who has gone down in Indian historiography not only as one of the prominent figures of the Indian Revolt of 1857–1858 but also as a symbol and epitome of resistance to the British dominance in nineteenth-century India. From 1857 to 1858, rebellions against British rule spread across the country². However, Rani's story was a part of a wider context. At the time of the outbreak of the 1857 uprising, the British had already ruled India for 258 years, which virtually began with the establishment of the East India Company (EIC) in 1600. Although economic themes loomed large, gaining direct access to the East meant the opportunity to outdo the Portuguese and Spanish in the region³. The EIC was a private trading company granted a commerce monopoly with Asia by Queen Elizabeth I. From that time until 1856, India was ruled by the Mughal dynasty. However, the last 100 years of this reign

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² P. Deshpande, *The Making of an Indian Nationalist Archive: Lakshmi Bai, Jhansi, and 1857*, "The Journal of Asian Studies" 2008, vol. 67, no. 3, pp. 855–879. The princely state of Jhansi was located in the northern part of India.

³ P. Lawson, *The East India Company: A History*, London–New York 2013, pp. 1–2. The British Crown rule in India dates from the victory at the Battle of Plassey (1757) and the British administrative authority of Bengal (1765) that followed. See A. Major, C. Bates, *Introduction: Fractured Narratives and Marginal Experiences*, [in:] *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, vol. II: *Britain and the Indian Uprising*, eds. C. Bates, A. Major, London 2013, p. xv.

were marked by invasions and interregional conflicts, which led to the gradual weakening of the Mughal Empire and an increasing influence of the East India Company in the region. The early eighteenth century was a period of political unrest in India. Therefore, the Company decided to train Indian soldiers, also called sepoys, to defend its factories and join them in the ranks of its army⁴.

The outbreak of the revolt in present-day Uttar Pradesh (then Meerut) was preceded by several incidents. Its proximate cause was the usage of Enfield rifles by the British army. There was a widespread belief among Hindu and Muslim soldiers that the cartridges were coated with lard (cow and pig fat). Thus, loading such weapons strongly insulted their religious practices. Further reasons lay in both the sepoys' grievances related to their subordination to the British troops and land annexations by the Company. In the social context, however, British authorities were accused of imposing high taxes on peasants. The rebellion flared up on May 11, 1857, and swept over northern India. The anti-British approach was shared by princes, landlords and peasantry as well.

Nevertheless, many Indian rulers favoured the British administration rather than rebel sepoys⁵. On August 2, 1858, the British Parliament adopted the Government of India Act. The Act's provisions included liquidating the British East India Company and transferring its authority to the Crown. The major consequence of this legislative decision was the growth of Indian nationalism as a response to British dominance⁶.

Research Questions, Aims, and Method of the Study

The article's main focus is to investigate the British and Indian narrative about the image of the legendary heroine, the Rani of Jhansi. The study contends that the British representation of Rani was rather unfavourable and thus served as an excuse for further colonisation. However, the Indian authors have written about the queen to build a sense of pride and national identity. There are various interpretations of 1857. The terms "mutiny" or "sepoymutiny" are used mostly by British authors, whereas nationalist Indian historians consider

⁴ M.H. Fisher, *An Environmental History of India from Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge 2018, p. 115; L.W. Hastings, *The Company Rule (1773–1858)*, https://www.vyomaonline.com/studymaterial/uploads/pdf/2020/11/13_f6d7f9a9c29df1746d24bcd3a001969f.pdf [accessed on: 29.06.2023]; S. Bose, A. Jalal, *Modern South Asia – History, Culture, Political Economy*, London–New York 2004, pp. 27–54.

⁵ M.R. Gubbins, *An Account of the Mutinies in Oudh and of the Siege of the Lucknow Residency*, London 1858, pp. 2–60.

⁶ D. Williams, *The Council of India and the Relationship between the Home and Supreme Governments, 1858–1870*, "The English Historical Review" 1966, vol. 81 (318), pp. 57–65; L.W. Hastings, op.cit.

these events as the “first war of independence” or a “war of Indian national independence”⁷.

The paper will seek to address several research questions about the use of the history of Rani. These include:

- What is the image of the Rani of Jhansi in the documentary and visual sources?
- What are the differences between the British and Indian perspectives on history and its use in their depiction of Rani? How do those views interact with each other?
- What is the purpose and role of the construction of memorials like those of Rani nowadays?

The paper is based on a qualitative research method. History is central in analysing the first-hand narratives of British and Indian authors, including archival accounts and visual sources of the Rani of Jhansi. A comparative perspective is also used. However, there is a paucity of primary sources written by Indian authors. Some accounts were banned and could not be published in India decades after the revolt. In turn, the accounts from the British archives are greatly limited to the materials regarding military contacts and personal diaries of the cavalrymen’s wives. An analysis of the existing literature is also conducted.

Previous studies have shown that Rani has been used as an icon for Indian nationalism. Bipan Chandra, in his *India’s Struggle for Independence*, presents Rani as an exceptional leader of the revolt of 1857 who, unlike many commanders, supported the rebels greatly. The author praises her deeds and bravery by naming her the only woman among the revolutionaries⁸. However, some historians gave Rani just a little consideration. For instance, in *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal concisely describe Lakshmi Bai’s deeds and perceive her only as one of the revolt leaders⁹. Stanley A. Wolpert, an author of *A New History of India*, gives a very brief depiction of Rani, who had to prove her bravery on the battlefield. The author writes about her, only in parentheses, regarding the Doctrine of Lapse¹⁰. In *Banaras, City of Light*, by Diana L. Eck, Rani is not even mentioned. Even though she was born there, the book does not provide any information about her birthplace.

⁷ R.S. Chaurasia, *History of modern India 1707 A.D. to up to 2000 A.D.*, New Delhi 2002, pp. 183–184.

⁸ B. Chandra, M. Mukherjee, A. Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar, S. Mahajan, *India’s Struggle for Independence 1857–1947*, New Delhi 1989, pp. 3–10, 33–40.

⁹ S. Bose, A. Jalal, op.cit., p. 73.

¹⁰ S.A. Wolpert, *A new history of India*, New York–Oxford 2004, pp. 224–225.

Similarly, the *Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* by Christophe Jaffrelot fails to make any references to the queen¹¹. Thus, in a historiographical context, Rani has been described ambiguously. Although she is admired in some works, some authors mention her in a truncated manner.

British historians have portrayed Rani in a rather negative light. In their writings, they mostly accused her of participating in the massacre. Furthermore, the colonial literature compared India to an unfaithful wife of the British husband¹². Satyendra Narayan Sinha and Joyce Lebra-Chapman have also conducted historical research on the Lakshmi Bai. The latter draws attention to the process of transforming the historical character of the queen into a legend. In her book, *The Rani of Jhansi: A Study in Female Heroism in India*, J. Lebra-Chapman indicates that such an icon becomes an integral part of folk culture, national identity and collective memory.

Moreover, the author argues that from the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1930s, the image of the has been used as a symbol for the nationalist movement against British rule. Later on, in the 1930s, she became an inspiration for resistance-themed poems. In the 1940s, writing about the revolt of 1857 or Rani was forbidden¹³. There was much interest in the revolt of 1857 and related publications ranging from survivor journals, such as Harris's *Lady's Diary*, to historical first-hand accounts like *A Personal Narrative of the Siege of Lucknow: From its Commencement to its Relief* by Sir Colin Campbell written by L.E. Rees, both from 1858, to a plethora of fiction stories. Drawing on drastic images of destruction and barbarism from the mutiny, an array of colonial accounts also captured the cultural and literary implications of the colonial fear after the revolt. These include *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins (1868), *Seeta* by Philip Meadows Taylor (1872), and *On the Face of the Waters* by Flora Annie Steel (1896)¹⁴.

The Life of Rani of Jhansi and the Events of 1857

In the narratives about Rani, facts and legends are often mingled. According to historical sources, the queen was presumably born to an ordinary Brahmin family on November 19, 1835 in Banaras, Varanasi district. She was named

¹¹ D.L. Eck, *Banaras, City of Light*, New York 1982; Ch. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*, London 1996.

¹² H. Singh, *The Rani of Jhansi: Gender, History, and Fable in India*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 14, 27, 33–34.

¹³ J. Lebra-Chapman, *The Rani of Jhansi: A Study in Female Heroism in India*, Honolulu 1986, pp. 118–146.

¹⁴ H. Singh, *The Rani of Jhansi...*, op.cit., p. 11.

Manikarnika, affectionately called Manu. Before Rani was born, her father, Moropant, was appointed an adviser to the service of the Peshwa (ruler) Baji Rao. After an early mother loss who died when Rani was four, Moropant often took his daughter to Rao's court, giving her access to an education. As a child, Rani spent time with Tatyá Tope and Nana Sahib, the boys who became prominent figures and leaders in 1857–1858. Although not of royal blood, she stood out among her peers, having significant talents in reading, writing, horse riding, and archery¹⁵.

In May 1842, Manu married the Raja Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi, the ruler of the province of Jhansi. She was renamed Lakshmi Bai during the wedding ceremony after the goddess of victory. In 1851, just three months after giving birth to her first son, she mourned his sudden death. Soon after, she became a widow. Lakshmi Bai and the Raja adopted a five-year-old boy, Damodar, to prevent the implementation of the Doctrine of Lapse. It was a policy that envisaged British annexation of the princely state in the case of the death of its ruler without a natural successor. Rani strongly opposed the annexation, but the state lapsed to the Crown authority in May 1854. She also refused the EIC's proposal of a pension and a palace at Jhansi for her residence if she agreed to cede control. As a result, the British stripped her of power¹⁶.

The revolt began on June 5, 1857 with the sepoys protests in the military regiment of Jhansi. They attacked the fort numerous times, but the British troops repelled this offensive. The Crown officials requested that Lakshmi Bai take charge of the state until the British administration can regain control. Instead, Rani joined the revolt and led her own army composed of men and women. After sepoys stormed the fortress again on June 8, 1857, the queen was accused of being involved in the massacre of European citizens living there. Nevertheless, most historians reject her actual participation¹⁷.

Rani attended to needy people, regardless of their caste. She often left the town walls to visit the temple of the goddess Lakshmi. Dressed in a white widow's sari, Rani traversed the streets, slinking between people imperceptibly. She much preferred to wear attire that was suited to her active life. For these reasons, Rani was criticised by more orthodox Brahmin residents of Jhansi¹⁸. She wore military attire while preparing to repel an attack from Orchha state in

¹⁵ S. Jain, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Women Through the Ages: Ancient India*, vol. 1, Delhi 2003, pp. 22–38; P.M. Joshi, *1857 and the Rani of Jhansi*, „Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute” 1968, vol. 29, no. 1/4, pp. 158–160.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 22–25.

¹⁷ S.N. Sinha, *Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi*, New Delhi 1980, pp. 43–53.

¹⁸ J. Lebra-Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

central India. It was when she realised that support from the British was essential to fight her own enemies. Unfortunately, she failed to receive a response from the Crown officials, who still might have found her guilty of the massacre of Englishmen in Jhansi. Because of the growing concerns that the British authorities might sentence her to death, she decided to join the revolutionary sepoys. Besides, she was certain that she would not get justice from them.

For this reason, Rani chose to fight and preferred a glorious death on the battlefield. The Governor-General of India, Charles Canning, proclaimed her a rebel leader. Sir Hugh Rose, the leader of the British troops, had been appointed to take control of the rebellion in Jhansi. The British troops arrived on March 21, 1858. When the invasion began, Rani sought help from Tatyja Tope, a childhood friend. Despite his army of more than 20,000 soldiers and Rani's leading role at the front, they were defeated¹⁹. After Rose attacked the fortress, the Jhansi went under British rule. He also fought victorious battles at Lahore, Kalpi, and Konch in May 1858. There are many versions of how Rani managed to escape to Kalpi. According to Indian authors, she jumped with a horse, and her little son tied to her back from the fortress²⁰. Other stories describe her wearing male clothes and leaving the stronghold at night. Ultimately, the sepoys with Rani at the forefront first succeeded in Gwalior. In June 1858, the British forces stormed the revolutionaries and forced them to retreat.

Nevertheless, versions of the event vary depending on the source used. Some argue that Rani perished in this battle on horseback. However, there are conflicting versions of the event. According to Rose, Lakshmi Bai was not killed in the fight but burnt in a funeral pile, which she ordered and fired by herself²¹.

John Latimer, who served in the Central India Field Force, provided an account of Rani's death. In a letter written on June 24 and then continued on July 9, 1858 from camp in Kalpi to his uncle in Britain, he reported: "(...) ... a fine-looking native woman was killed in the pursuit by a grape shot it is supposed, She was riding a white mare which was also shot, A beautifully limbed and pretty woman she must have been (...). The so-called Ranee of Jhansi has been killed at Gwalior. She seems to have been a brave and determined woman, worthy of a better fate, the cruelties attributed to her at Jhansi (...)"²².

¹⁹ S.N. Sinha, op.cit., pp. 64–77; H. Singh, *India's Rebel Queen: Rani Lakshmi Bai and the 1857 Uprising. Women Warriors and National Heroes: Global Histories*, London 2020, p. 28.

²⁰ J. Lebra-Chapman, op.cit., pp. 92–93.

²¹ S.N. Sinha, op.cit., pp. 77–90.

²² *John Latimer's letter*, [in:] *John Latimer papers*, India Office Records and Private Papers, MSS Eur C596: 1858, Asian & African Studies Reference Services, The British Library.

Rani, the Queen of Jhansi in Indian and British Historiography

The number of existing accounts written by British and Indian authors on the revolt of 1857–1858 is significant and provides the readers with a unique primary source pool. First-hand accounts present various aspects of the event. However, documentary sources also require a critical assessment by historians. British authors usually refer to the rebellion of 1857 as the “mutiny”, while Indians prefer to use the term “war of independence”. The Rani of Jhansi is much eulogised in the Indian narratives and, though reluctantly, in British sources, which mostly draw attention to her bravery and boldness. While the Indian authors have written about Lakshmi Bai to build a sense of national identity among Indian people, the British have seen her complicity in the Jhansi massacre²³. Latimer wrote on July 9, 1858: “(...) Our unhappy countrymen and countrywomen may have been, it is true, killed with her sanction, but it is generally believed that she could not have saved them had she wished it, the terrible atrocities attributed to her have been found to have been purely fictitious”²⁴.

Little is known about Rani. She has usually been mentioned in the context of the events of 1857. Therefore, any historical source regarding her life is of the highest value for a historian. *1857: The Real Story of the Great Uprising* (original *Maajha Pravas – 1857 Chya Bandachi Hakikat*) is an eyewitness account by an Indian author Vishnu Bhatt Godshe Versaiker. It should also be noted that a publication of any account of the revolt that differed from the official version was suppressed during his lifetime. Ultimately, his book was published in Marathi in 1907. Its original version was written in the Modi Script and then translated into Marathi. In a 24-year retrospective record, he recalls the events he witnessed²⁵.

Versaiker’s account provides a gory description of the revolt and is a unique documentation of the life of Rani, whom he knew personally. The book records several years of the author’s journey, which unexpectedly coincided with the events of 1857. Because of family debts, Versaiker, under the name of Marathi Brahim, his uncle, decided to head north of India to earn money by participating in religious ceremonies for healthy people. Eventually, it took him nearly three years to return home. Due to the past association of Versaiker’s uncle with Rani’s father, Moropant Tambe, they both obtained access to the palace

²³ R. Tapti, *Raj of the Rani*, New Delhi 2006, pp. 86–88.

²⁴ John Latimer’s letter, op.cit.

²⁵ V.B.G. Versaiker, *1857: The Real Story of the Great Uprising*, New Delhi 2015.

at Jhansi. The author became a part of the Lakshmi Bai entourage and lived in the fort in the royal quarters. It allowed him to observe and record the ambience in the fort and the preparations to repel the British siege. Writing about this, Versaiker reveals Rani's alertness and, despite her young age, her maturity and developed personality. In his account, the author mentions a scene of Rani leaning over the papers with her chief commanders and planning the strategies for the army²⁶.

Similarly, the author was under a great impression of Rani's leadership abilities after she refused to capitulate. Understanding the necessity to shore up the people's morale for the fierce struggle ahead, the queen hosted a *haldi kumkum* ceremony in her palace for all the town's women. While describing this splendid event, Versaiker writes about a nearly hundred women dressed in their finery, who were celebrating till late at night. By writing this account, Versaiker reveals some undiscovered earlier facts about Rani's life. In doing so, he provides a vivid description of her casual attire, indicating that during most battles, the queen preferred to wear male clothing and used this outfit as camouflage while travelling across India. From the author's report, we learn, for instance, that Rani's husband, Gangadhar Rao, often cross-dressed in female dresses, spending much of his time in the women's quarters. Versaiker also mentions the cruelty Rani faced from her older husband. He is impressed that despite all these adversities, she came to power and majestically ruled her state as the queen of Jhansi. His account presents Rani as a tireless warrior who breaks through the British cordon around the Jhansi and rides away under the cover of darkness to continue the fight. Here, his last memories about the brave and resolute Lakshmi Bai contrasted sharply with the sight of this Indian queen who would face defeat at the hands of the British and sacrifice her life in the battle²⁷.

The author's narration is sometimes exaggerated. As an eyewitness of Rani's life, he has some share in glorifying her deeds. His account draws attention to Rani's mastery of martial arts and her knowledge of scriptures. As conceded by the author, other rulers, in contrast to Rani, resembled typical Brahmins who only looked for material favours. Versaiker does not hide his admiration and growing fascination with the Lakshmi Bai. On the contrary, he shows the reader Rani in intimate moments. For instance, when she noticed that her menstruation began during her morning ablution, she felt ashamed, angry and helpless. Versaiker's narration creates impressive visual imagery. His

²⁶ Ibidem, pp. 78–85.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 70.

account is one of the sources that give precious insights into the life of Rani. In nationalist history, she was described as a character who restored order and unity even before the revolt²⁸.

Another book, titled *The Indian War of Independence*, written by a nationalist Indian historian, Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, also honours Rani as one of the heroes of the revolt. Although British historians had named the 1857–1858 events as a mutiny and a rebellion of no significance, Savarkar seeks to prove that it was the first freedom struggle in his account. Though the book was declared illegal at the time and could not be released in India, it gained popularity and became widespread among revolutionaries. Its publication was banned in India even 50 years after the revolt. In this account, Savarkar questions the officially accepted theories of British historians on the history of the rebellion. For this reason, the British government considered the book an example of seditious literature²⁹.

Savarkar's writings suggest that he accords women a role in the freedom struggle. For this reason, supposedly, he uses the image of Rani as a symbol of the fight for independence. In this account, he claims that a woman can show her dedication to the motherland by cultivating heroic features in her son and her own involvement in battle³⁰. By mentioning Rani as the bravest woman, the author praises her as a resolute military leader, famous in battle for her "inspiring heroism even in the coldest hearts"³¹.

Savarkar devotes the tenth chapter in the third part (The Conflagration) of his narrative to Rani. Savarkar associates her with the forthcoming revolutionary by assuring her that he will never give Rani up. On the other hand, the queen claims that she will never give Jhansi up. However, he adds that the British troops defeated Rani. Writing within a narrative, he depicts Rani standing on the walls of the Jhansi fortress and looking down with grief. Here, Savarkar praises her for her courage, noble heart, and sacrificing her life in the battle at Gwalior. A description of the queen's death is more detailed than the one presented in Malleison's account about the Indian Mutiny of 1857–1858. In his narrative, Savarkar expresses great grief over Rani's death, dubbing her a goddess of war³².

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 120–143.

²⁹ B. Singh Rana, *Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar: An Immortal Revolutionary of India*, New Delhi 2004, p. 24.

³⁰ V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, London 1909, p. 227.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 464.

³² Ibidem, pp. 383–400.

In his account, the author also describes her appearance. In doing so, he emphasises that Rani, as a widow, adheres to the principles of the Indian tradition. It is evident, especially in her unadorned outfit. Savarkar pays much attention to independence and liberty, his highest value as a nationalist writer. He equates both terms in his narrative with Rani's fight for freedom. Savarkar revives the memory of Rani. In his book, the majestic role of Maratha's power is represented by the figure of Rani. He dubs her a "martyr" who sacrificed her life for the country, freedom and religion. His narrative of Rani intersperses with the history of India in which the queen emerged as a hero of the freedom revolt. In his account, Savarkar gives the highest tribute to Rani.

In his *Swadharma and Swaraj*, Savarkar compares Rani to the muse of history, who remained faithful to the principles of the revolt. The account focuses both on her feminine qualities, such as beauty or sacrifice and the traits that were masculine, too, like chivalry and bravery. In a famous poem, *Jhansi ki Rani*, an Indian poetess, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, also wrote that Rani was the only one who fought boldly like a man. The poem extols Rani's courage in fighting against the British troops³³.

Much has been written and narrated about Britain's "mutiny" and India's "war of independence" on both sides of the divide. Apart from the discussed accounts, there are also remarkable examples of nineteenth-century colonial historiography. Interestingly, early British press reports on the uprising (The Lady's Newspaper and Pictorial Times) tend to tone down its significance – besides, it took six weeks for the letters to reach Britain. Due to the absence of up-to-date information, the British authorities could display an official narrative that disguised the extent of widespread discontent in India. Official accounts drew attention to the military aspects of the revolt, categorising it as a "Sepoy Mutiny" and assigning blame for it only to dissatisfied sepoys, tribals or local offenders³⁴. However, one of the British accounts describes Rani as follows: "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"³⁵.

³³ *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the early twentieth century*, vol. I: 600 B.C. to the early 20th century, eds. J.S. Tharu, K. Lalita, New York 1991, p. 419.

³⁴ R. Merritt, *Public Perceptions of 1857: An Overview of British Press Responses to the Indian Uprising*, [in:] *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, vol. 3: *Global perspectives*, eds. C. Bates, M. Carter, New Delhi 2013, pp. 2–3.

³⁵ Cit. per: *The Indian Mutiny 1857–1858: Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India 1857–1858*, vol. III, ed. G.W. Forest, pp. 2–3.

Alexander Duff, the first Christian missionary of the Church of Scotland to India, is the author of one of the most widely quoted accounts of the revolt – *The Indian Mutiny – Its Causes and Results* from 1858. His narrative, the collection of 25 letters, emphasises the deep-seated hostility of the Indians to the British. Duff mentions that the controversy around the cartridges was supposedly only a pretext in the hands of wicked people and that the real cause of the hostility was political³⁶. However, the author tries to dissuade the reader from the view that unchecked conversions were the cause of the revolt. His account records an image of the events of 1857, which abounds in drastic scenes of the mutineers killing the captives. One of their leaders, Nana Sahib, has been dubbed a monster³⁷.

In Duff's colonial narrative, Rani has also been involved in the Jhansi massacre. In his fourth letter from July 1857, the author mentions, "mutineers, assisted with guns and elephants by Rani or Queen, succeeded in effecting an entrance at one of the gates". Duff's narrative leaves no illusions about the barbarism and cruelty of the rebels, especially towards women and children. He mentions scenes of torture that were too gruesome to be narrated³⁸. Indeed, Rani appears in almost every British account regarding the massacre. Thus, she gained the title of the real-life representation of the homicidal Indian goddess Kali. Rani's death during the battle in Gwalior ultimately contributed to the end of the rebellion of 1857–1858.

Frances Duberly also experienced the revolt. As the wife of paymaster of a cavalry regiment in the British Army, she travelled to India in the year of the rebellion. Her account *Campaigning Experiences in Rajpootana and Central India: During the Suppression of the Mutiny, 1857–1858*, describes over a 2000-mile march from Bombay to Gwalior, the place of Rani's final defeat. Despite having already experienced the war in Crimea, Daubery reveals in the diary her excitement and lack of fear regarding the rebellion that awaits her³⁹.

In the personal narrative of the events of 1857, she uses allusion regarding her meeting with Rani. From this record, it appears that the queen of Jhansi continually showed a great interest in the war issues, inquiring Duberly about her presence at the battle during the Crimean War. The author could then notice all the emotions that tormented Rani, especially helplessness and crushed

³⁶ A. Duff, *The Indian Rebellion: Its Causes and Results*, New York 1858, pp. 50–51.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 73.

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 62–63.

³⁹ F. Duberly, *Campaigning Experiences in Rajpootana and Central India: During the Suppression of the Mutiny, 1857–1858*, London 1859.

ambitions⁴⁰. She suggests that the queen was truly impressed by, and even envious of, Duberly's prior battle experiences⁴¹. Rani also had her own memories from the battlefield, especially when she planned the strategies for the Jhansi army against the British troops. In her journal, Duberly states that once the queen was grievously wounded during the Gwalior battle, she preferred dying than being captured. These historical events of 1857 created an iconic portrayal of Rani, who became a distinctive figure among many other heroes in the history of India⁴².

By writing about soldiers' zeal to fight and their disappointment that the revolt would probably be over before their arrival, Duberly recalls British national pride and unity against Indian enemies. She reiterates British moral superiority that has to be made incontrovertible⁴³. Further in her diary, she mentions Rani's death with no sentiment. Duberly writes that the queen's "restless and intriguing spirit passed away: a subject of regret to those who admired her energy and courage, but of congratulation" to those concerned in endeavouring to solve the intricate affairs of India⁴⁴. The most striking in her narrative is the enthusiasm for British vengeance that would involve dipping hands in the blood of Britain's enemies⁴⁵. It should also be noted that she wrote her diary from the perspective of a British soldier and a person whose war experiences had hardened. As a result, her narrative is characterised by indelicate and "unwomanly" vocabulary. Duberly gives an account of warfare and violence.

Chapter two of *Kaye's and Malleeson's of the History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858* refers to Rani in the context of the Doctrine of Lapse. This six-volume account was first written in 1890 by Colonel George Malleeson, who combined *History of the Sepoy War in India* by Sir John Kaye with his own later writing. According to Kaye's narrative, the revolt of 1857 was an event of the British "national character". Malleeson, on the other hand, was sometimes unafraid to criticise the British administration. In the third chapter of this account, the author mentions Rani, who had fled after the defeat at Galauli. According to Malleeson's assessment, Rani and other rebel leaders were in a desperate situation, surrounded by enemies. He considers her to be the main conspirator in the battle at Gopalpur. Writing within this context, Malleeson

⁴⁰ Ibidem, pp. 40-41.

⁴¹ I. Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*, London 1996, p. 11.

⁴² R. Tapti, op.cit., p. 238.

⁴³ F. Duberly, op.cit., pp. 9-10.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 26.

reveals his opinion of Rani as a person urged on by the desire for vengeance, hatred, and a blood-stained conscience. Through the experience on the battlefield, she realised the first part of her plan and entered the fort of Gwalior. Following the battle, the British officers could not hide their amazement at Rani's daring, thanks to which she realised her audacious strategy on the battlefield. The command of the majority of the troops was also entrusted to her. In a dynamic description of Rani riding her horse in a man's attire, Malleeson reveals the last moments preceding her death during the final battle at Gwalior⁴⁶.

As stated in the source, Rani was panting for revenge. Although the British officials regarded her wrath and irritation with indifference, they were aware of Rani's indignity, whom they ironically dubbed a high-spirited lady. She was considered a person who succeeded in arousing the trust of others. As stated in an account, Rani sought to maintain the fort during the struggle. As a result, the rebels bound the European captives and carried them to a garden known as Joka Bagh. The account records here a drastic description of a massacre. The author has questioned Rani's complicity in the massacre. Due to her inspiring bravery, the queen was able to repel the attack of the British troops. In his account, Malleeson writes that despite her faults, Rani will always be perceived as a heroine by her countrymen. The sources represent Rani in the context of the revolt, which has often been widely discussed within military records concerning India⁴⁷.

A Visual Representation of Rani

The paper attempts to answer how Rani is memorised in the visual representation. In addition to first-hand accounts, there is material evidence, such as the Maharani Lakshmi Bai memorial and the 19th-century painting of her.

As for an outward appearance, an account provided by one of the British lawyers residing in India describes Rani as a "woman of about middle size rather stout but not too stout. Her face must have been very handsome when she was younger, and even now, it had many charms. The expression was

⁴⁶ C. Malleeson, J. Kaye, *Kaye's and Malleeson's History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858*, London 1889, pp. 149-155.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 120. The account left by Ruth Coopland (1859), a widow of the rev. George W. Coopland, reflects an unspeakable horror of the revolt the author witnessed during the Indian Mutiny which flared up shortly after their arrival in Gwalior. Unlike Malleeson's account which is often considered more technical, the Coopland's one is a poignant account of sepoy's brutality, including her husband's murder. R.M. Coopland, *A Lady's Escape from Gwalior and Life in the Fort of Agra During the Mutinies of 1857*, London 1859.

very good and very intelligent. The eyes were particularly fine and nose very delicately shaped⁴⁸.

The revolt of 1857–1858 has shown Rani's metamorphosis from a harmless, demure woman to a resolute and fearless warrior. This transformation can also be seen in the visual sources representing her image. An equestrian portrait of Rani is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Figure 1). The painting, titled *Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi on horseback*, was produced in Kolkata, India, by an unknown artist. The work depicts a full-length image of the queen on her horse and was painted circa 1885, after Rani's death. It is an opaque watercolour painting made on paper and painted in the Kalighat style. The artist depicts Rani as a refined and proud queen.

The painting portrays an image of Rani in ceremonial red attire and a plumed hat. Lakshmi Bai appears to be presented on it before the revolt. Rani and her horse are painted using bright colours. The artist depicted her figure and face in a rather oval shape. The rounded figures of Rani and her horse are in harmony. The artist used simplicity of form to emphasise the queen's profound sense of dignity. The painting presents the royal splendour of Rani, wearing exquisite jewellery. These include a pearl necklace consisting of several strands of pearls that appear larger in the outer and central parts. Rani also wears pearl bracelets and large round earrings matching the necklace.

The queen's facial features in the portrait represent her youthful charm. The artist created an image of soft oval physiognomy but still with a resolute gaze. The painting draws the viewer's attention to Rani's eyes with their commanding and mesmerising expression. It is not only a form of courtly flattery of the painter to the queen, but this "eye effect" can also highlight the respect she evoked. In this image, one can search vainly for the delicate and empty stare well-known from the Indian lyrics. We rather experience a gaze overflowing with confidence and pride and human warmth that can be seen in Rani's slight smile to the viewer. Her big eyes reveal an unceasing earnestness and readiness to fight the British.

In the right hand, Rani clasps a riding crop. It is gently marked with a single line. Interestingly, it is not a sword. In her left hand, she holds the horse's reins. The artist used gently curved lines in blue to depict Rani's horse. It may have served to emphasise a sense of peace and harmony.

In Taylor Meadows' description of Rani, one can read that she had a noble figure and dignified expression. The author delineates her as "fair and

⁴⁸ Cit. per: D.V. Tahmankar, *The Ranee of Jhansi*, London 1958, p. 25.

handsome"⁴⁹. After she became a widow, Rani began to wear male attire. The queen used to put on a traditional Indian pyjama (*churidar*), a dark coat, a stunning turban and a decorative sword by her side. She occasionally wore dresses.

Moreover, as a widow, she never put on a nose ring. Presumably, the painting of Rani shows her image before the death of her husband. The author writes that Rani wore only diamond jewellery, such as bangles around her hands, a ring on her little finger, and a necklace of pearls around her neck. It is also mentioned that, unlike in the painting, the queen's hair was gathered behind her head because Indian widows were obliged to shear their hair⁵⁰. The painting presents Rani with long, black hair.

From a personal account written by John Lang, a solicitor who counselled the queen in her dispute with the British over her throne in 1858, one will see her adherence to tradition. Lang's reports about Rani are relevant to her image from the painting. He found her to be a middle-sized woman with, according to him, a too-round face. Additionally, he noticed her gentle facial features⁵¹.

The portrait of Rani is of high historical value. Indian artists began to create Kaligah-style works that revealed local customs or history. Paintings of this kind were famous for their simplicity of form, swift brushstrokes and fabulous use of colour. This image of Rani is part of a series from an inherited collection of pictures, which probably were originally collected by the donor's ancestor and brought from India.

The memorial of Rani is one of the countless portrait statues of a female rider (Figure 2). In the history of sculpture, it is called an equestrian statue. It is a golden-coloured monument of Rani on horse. On the surrounding sidewalls adjoining the memorial, there is a pictorial representation of important scenes from the queen's life in golden colour. On three side walls of a marble pedestal is an inscription in Hindi. An English version of it and a short life story of Rani is also given on the side of the pedestal. The text comes from the widely known poem *Jhansi ki Rani* written by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan. Gold engraved lines of words evoke the importance of the place and a sense of patriotism⁵².

The majestic statue with Rani riding a golden horse has been constructed in her birthplace and dedicated to the memory of her great sacrifice. The monu-

⁴⁹ T. Meadows, *Seeta*, London 1872, p. 408.

⁵⁰ M.P. Joshi, op.cit., pp. 161–162.

⁵¹ J. Lang, *In the Court of the Ranees of Jhansi: Other Travels in India*, London 1858, p. 93.

⁵² Ch. Swati, *Maharani Lakshmi Bai's place lies in neglect*, „The Times of India”, 2.11.2013, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/maharani-lakshmi-bais-birth-place-lies-in-neglect/article-show/25086158.cms> [accessed on: 20.06.2023].

ment presents a dynamic fighting scene of Rani. She is mounted upon the horse with a little child, probably her son, swaddled tightly on her back. The queen raises a huge sword with one hand, holding the reins in the other. The records show Rani was fighting with her adopted son Damodar, tied to her back. The constant liveliness that can be seen on the monument is represented by Rani's male-style clothing. On the statue's left hand is a fluttering piece of her attire, as if the gust of wind blows it up. It is a cloth around her slender waist (*dupeta*). On the monument, Rani is dressed as an ordinary *sowar* – a horse-soldier in the British Raj period. Both the postures of Rani and her horse are presented in detail. They are adorned with pendants that are not originally part of the monument. The horse wears only a harness. It can also be noticed that the upper torso and head of the queen and the front half of her horse appear to be connected. The horse is rampant, with both front legs in the air. The monument commemorates Rani, symbolising resistance to British rule and the queen's strength and commitment. Both visual sources present opposing images of Rani. The painting reveals her charm, youth and royal dignity, whereas the monument reflects her transformation into a fearless revolt leader.

The queen of Jhansi has also been honoured with a statue built in Banares, near her birthplace. The construction of the statue began in 2010. The monument entitled *Queen of Jhansi, Laxmi Bais*, is located in the memorial park. The memorial was unveiled in December 2013 in the presence of Uttar Pradesh tourism minister Om Prakash Singh⁵³. There is a common belief among the local people that Assi Ghat in Banares was the place of Rani's birth. The state authorities placed a stone with Rani's name in this area.

Moreover, in an "Aaj" newspaper article from 1952, it can be found that the government made efforts to preserve Rani's birthplace by making a rock inscription in her honour. Furthermore, at the government's initiative, a memorial park and a statue of Rani were to be created. However, the local inhabitants refused to give up their land to the officials. Due to the land dispute, the park and the monument eventually occupy a smaller area than planned. The whole complex includes the memorial park with the statue of Rani and the museum of her name.

The monument's construction coincided with the process of political change in India and coming to the power of the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014. The BJP aimed to highlight the Hindu culture. Since then,

⁵³ Now, *Maharani Lakshmi Bai memorial dedicated to public*, „The Times of India”, 24.12.2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-24/varanasi/45539607_1_tourism-%20minister-holy-dip-memorial [accessed on: 20.01.2014].

the freedom fighters have again been glorified. Indian nationalist politicians began using Rani's image in the political fight. The party (BJP) has described itself as an institutional counterpart of the queen that will liberate India from the National Congress Party.

The statues dedicated to Rani can be found in other cities throughout India. There are monuments of her on horseback installed in Jhansi, Solapur, New Delhi, or Gwalior – the place where she sacrificed her life⁵⁴. In Banares, for instance, Rani has been considered a national symbol of unbreakable patriotism and a symbol of the city. The queen became a national heroine and still holds an important place in the Indian collective memory. Her statue is not only a historical object but also a place of commemoration of freedom struggle. For this reason, her monument was installed 155 years after her death and over 60 years after regaining independence by India in 1947.

Conclusion

The article examines a documentary and visual representation of Rani, Queen of Jhansi. The narratives on the revolt of 1857–1858 draw attention to the division in the perception of Rani by different authors. Reflecting on historical narratives, the paper looks at historical accounts of the rebellion and argues that the British perception of the events as the “mutiny” reflects the desire to recognise them as an act of betrayal. On the other hand, Postcolonial India remembers the 1857 as the “first war of independence” which has helped build a narrative of resistance. Many British historians have emphasised Rani's complicity in the massacre of the British at Joka Bagh. However, some claim the Queen of Jhansi was not directly involved in the crime. In Indian historiography, Rani holds an exalted place as a national heroine and a leader of the Indian army. Due to her courage and great sacrifice, she became a symbol of the Indian independence movement. She has been considered the epitome of astonishing female courage who has improved women's status in the patriarchal system.

Much attention has been given to the visual depictions of Rani. By scrutinising her pictorial and statuary representations, the study reveals the queen's transformation from a demure girl and harmless queen into a resolute woman

⁵⁴ 1957: *Jhansi Rani's statue*, „The Hindu”, 18.08.1957, <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-miscellaneous/dated-August-18-1957-Jhansi-Ranirsquos-statue/article14818142.ece> [accessed on: 20.04.2023]; *Rani Laxmi Bai statue installed*, „The Hindu”, 11.02.2008, <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/Rani-Laxmi-Bai-statue-installed/article15162357.ece> [accessed on: 20.06.2023].

and bold warrior. While the equestrian statue of the queen reflects her maturity and developed personality, the painting of her is devoted to her youth. Previous research has shown that the queen has been presented in various contexts. Over the years, Rani has become an important part of Indian folklore. Historical narratives often confuse the readers rooted in traditional history, local myths and legends. In the Indian nationalist narrative, Rani has been transformed into an almost mythical creature. The events of 1857–1858 have been controversial, with many conflicting interpretations provided by British and Indian authors.

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Appendices

Figure 1. *Rani Lakshmi Bai*, 1885 (452 x 277mm). London: Victoria and Albert Museum. IS. 655-1950. Available at: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O72088/rani-lakshmi-bai-painting-unknown/>



Figure 2. *Queen of Jhansi, Laxmi Bai*, 2013. Bronze. Jhansi: Memorial Park. Available at: <http://paras.me/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Screen-shot-2013-12-21-at-12.54.01-PM.png>



How is the Rani of Jhansi Memorised in the History of the Nineteenth-Century India? Selection of Historical Accounts

Summary

The article examines the visual sources and historical first-hand accounts depicting Rani Lakshmi Bai, the queen of the princely state of Jhansi, who became a symbol of Indian resistance against British rule during the 1857–1858 struggle for freedom. The study covers the colonial period of Indian history. The paper's main argument is that there are differences in the representation of Rani by British and Indian authors. Within their narratives, In-

dian writers favourably present the queen, while the British tend to show her less flattering portrayal. Concentrating on visual sources, the study analyses Rani's figure by looking at two stages of her life: the youth and the time of the revolt. The article also focuses on the queen's image in the contemporary political discourse. The paper is based on a qualitative approach emphasising historical perspective. Therefore, it analyses the printed materials, including archival primary sources. Based on a postcolonial literature review, the use of British and Indian sources is comparative.

Keywords: Rani of Jhansi, India, revolt of 1857–1858, visual and print primary sources

Как Королева Джханси запомнилась в истории Индии XIX века? Подборка исторических источников

Резюме

В статье анализируются визуальные источники и исторические рассказы, изображающие Лакшми Баи, королеву княжеского государства Джханси, которая стала символом индийского сопротивления британскому правлению во время борьбы за свободу 1857–1858 гг. Статья посвящена колониальному периоду в истории Индии. Основная предпосылка статьи заключается в том, что существуют различия в изображении Рани британскими и индийскими авторами. Повествования индийских писателей создают благоприятный образ королевы. Британцы, напротив, склонны изображать ее в менее лестном свете. Визуальные источники, с другой стороны, фокусируются на характере Рани, основываясь на двух этапах ее жизни: юности и периоде восстания. В статье также уделяется внимание современным ссылкам на образ королевы в политическом дискурсе. Статья основана на качественном подходе с акцентом на историческую перспективу. Соответственно, были проанализированы печатные материалы, включая архивные первоисточники. На основе обзора постколониальной литературы проведен сравнительный анализ использования британских и индийских источников.

Ключевые слова: Рани, Королева Джханси, Индия; восстание 1857–1858 гг., первичные печатные и визуальные источники