**Lakshmi Bai**

**Lakshmi Bai**, also spelled **Laxmi Bai**, (born *c.* November 19, 1835, [Kashi](https://www.britannica.com/place/Varanasi), India—died June 17, 1858, Kotah-ki-Serai, near Gwalior), rani (queen) of [Jhansi](https://www.britannica.com/place/Jhansi) and a leader of the [Indian Mutiny](https://www.britannica.com/event/Indian-Mutiny) of 1857–58.

Brought up in the household of the [*peshwa*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/peshwa) (ruler) Baji Rao II, [Lakshmi](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lakshmi) Bai had an unusual upbringing for a [Brahman](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brahman-caste) girl. Growing up with the boys in the *peshwa*’s court, she was trained in martial arts and became proficient in sword fighting and riding. She married the [maharaja](https://www.britannica.com/topic/maharaja) of Jhansi, Gangadhar Rao, but was widowed without bearing a surviving heir to the throne. Following established Hindu tradition, just before his death the maharaja adopted a boy as his heir. [Lord Dalhousie](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Andrew-Broun-Ramsay-Marquess-of-Dalhousie), the British governor-general of India, refused to recognize the adopted heir and annexed Jhansi in accordance with the [doctrine of lapse](https://www.britannica.com/topic/doctrine-of-lapse). An agent of the [East India Company](https://www.britannica.com/topic/East-India-Company) was posted in the small kingdom to look after administrative matters.

The 22-year-old queen refused to cede Jhansi to the British. Shortly after the beginning of the mutiny in 1857, which broke out in [Meerut](https://www.britannica.com/place/Meerut), Lakshmi Bai was proclaimed the regent of Jhansi, and she ruled on behalf of the minor heir. Joining the uprising against the British, she rapidly organized her troops and assumed charge of the rebels in the [Bundelkhand](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bundelkhand) region. Mutineers in the neighboring areas headed toward Jhansi to offer her support.

Under Gen. [Hugh Rose](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hugh-Henry-Rose-Baron-Strathnairn-of-Strathnairn-and-of-Jhansi), the East India Company’s forces had begun their counteroffensive in Bundelkhand by January 1858. Advancing from [Mhow](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mhow), Rose captured Saugor (now [Sagar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sagar)) in February and then turned toward Jhansi in March. The company’s forces surrounded the fort of Jhansi, and a fierce battle raged. Offering stiff resistance to the invading forces, Lakshmi Bai did not surrender even after her troops were overwhelmed and the rescuing army of [Tantia Tope](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tantia-Tope), another rebel leader, was defeated at the Battle of Betwa. Lakshmi Bai managed to escape from the fort with a small force of palace guards and headed eastward, where other rebels joined her.

Tantia Tope and Lakshmi Bai then mounted a successful assault on the city-fortress of [Gwalior](https://www.britannica.com/place/Gwalior-India). The treasury and the arsenal were seized, and [Nana Sahib](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nana-Sahib), a prominent leader, was proclaimed as the [*peshwa*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/peshwa) (ruler). After taking Gwalior, Lakshmi Bai marched east to Morar to confront a British counterattack led by Rose. Dressed as a man, she fought a fierce battle and was killed in combat.