



Modern Indian History Series

1857 Revolt : Jhansi, Gwalior, Central India

Rani Lakshmi Bai | Tatya Tope | Modern History | UPSC

Jhansi | Gwalior | Kalpi | Rani Lakshmi Bai | Tatya Tope | Hugh Rose

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Jhansi — The Rebel Fort

Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Doctrine of Lapse, and the long hold

1. Jhansi Erupts (June 1857)

By early June 1857, the rebellion wave reached Jhansi. On **5 June 1857**, Company sepoy rose in revolt. British officers and residents in Jhansi were killed in the violence that followed. British authority inside the town collapsed within hours.

The rebel sepoy groups did not stay in Jhansi. Many moved out to join bigger fighting zones — especially Delhi and the North Indian belt where the war was becoming larger. This left Jhansi without a stable central authority.

2. Rani Lakshmi Bai Takes Charge

Rani Lakshmi Bai (born Manikarnika Tambe, 1828, Varanasi) had married Maharaja Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi in 1842. After his death in 1853, the British refused to recognise her adopted son **Damodar Rao** as heir, invoking the **Doctrine of Lapse**. Jhansi was annexed. She famously declared: "**Main apni Jhansi nahin doongi**" (I shall not surrender my Jhansi).

With rebel sepoys departing and no British authority remaining, the state could not be left leaderless. Rani Lakshmi Bai stepped forward and took charge of administration and defence from the fort. From June 1857 to March 1858, Jhansi remained under her control — a remarkably long rebel hold.

UPSC Note: The Doctrine of Lapse (Lord Dalhousie, 1848–56) was one of the major political causes of 1857. States annexed: Satara (1848), Jaitpur & Sambalpur (1849), Baghat (1850), Udaipur (1852), Jhansi (1853), Nagpur (1854).

Tatya Tope — The Relentless Commander

From Kanpur escape to guerrilla warfare across Central India

3. Escape from Kanpur (July 1857)

Tatya Tope (Ramchandra Pandurang Tope, born 1814) was the brilliant military commander of **Nana Saheb**. In Kanpur, Nana Saheb was the political face, but Tatya Tope planned and fought the battles. After the British captured Kanpur in July 1857, Nana Saheb fled and vanished from history. But Tatya Tope escaped with a large rebel force and kept moving — always searching for the next opportunity.

4. The Second Battle of Kanpur (19 Nov – 6 Dec 1857)

In November 1857, the British moved large forces from Kanpur toward Lucknow, which had become a major crisis zone. This movement reduced British strength in Kanpur. Tatya Tope saw this gap clearly.

From **19 November 1857**, Tatya Tope attacked Kanpur in this vulnerable period. For 17 days, fighting was intense. Supply routes were cut. Pressure built again on

the city. Finally, on **6 December 1857**, the British secured Kanpur again. But Tatya Tope slipped away from British clutches once more.

5. Kalpi — The Rebel Junction (Dec 1857 – Mar 1858)

From December 1857 to March 1858, Tatya Tope kept moving — collecting fighters, building links, and planning fresh attacks. He centred around **Kalpi**, which sat on the Yamuna route and worked as a strategic junction between Kanpur and the Bundelkhand–Central India side. **Rao Sahib** (Nana Saheb's nephew) was also based here. Kalpi became a useful rebel base for organising men and supplies.

Why Jhansi Stayed Untouched Till March 1858

Understanding British priorities and resource limits

6. British Strategic Priorities

The revolt rose almost everywhere around the same time — May–June 1857. But the British were not a single army that could hit every place together. They were spread thin. They had to protect routes, bring troops from far, and choose where to spend their strength.

Theatre	Duration	British Priority
Delhi	May – Sep 1857 (~4 months)	FIRST — symbol of Mughal authority
Kanpur	Jun – Jul 1857 (~1.5 months)	Fast crisis, resolved quickly
Lucknow	Jun 1857 – Mar 1858 (~9 months)	SECOND — longest, hardest fight
Jhansi	Untouched till Mar 1858	THIRD — after Lucknow fell

Key insight: Only after Lucknow was fully captured on **21 March 1858** could the British turn their full attention to Jhansi. That is exactly when Jhansi came into their focus — late March 1858.

The Siege of Jhansi

Hugh Rose, the 12-day siege, and Lakshmbai's escape

7. Hugh Rose Arrives (24 March 1858)

By **24 March 1858**, the British force under **Sir Hugh Rose** (Commander of the Central India Field Force) reached Jhansi and laid siege. Guns began firing. The British started breaking the defences. Jhansi answered back with its own fire. Lakshmbai did not surrender.

UPSC Note: Hugh Rose later wrote about Lakshmbai: "She was the bravest and best military leader of the rebels. A man among the mutineers." This quote has appeared in UPSC questions about British assessments of rebel leaders.

8. Tatya Tope's Relief Attempt Fails

Jhansi called for help. Tatya Tope came with a large force to relieve the siege. But Rose defeated this relieving force near the **Betwa area** at the end of March / start of April 1858. After that defeat, Jhansi was left to face the siege alone.

9. Fall of Jhansi (3 April 1858)

The British decided to assault. Jhansi was stormed on **3 April 1858**. Street fighting broke out. Looting followed. The fort was about to fall fully into British hands.

10. The Escape — Night of 3–4 April 1858

During the night of **3–4 April 1858**, Rani Lakshmbai escaped. She did not want to be captured. She did not want to die inside the fort and end the story there. She wanted the rebellion to stay alive. She escaped with her son **Damodar Rao** and headed toward Kalpi, reaching there around midnight on **5 April 1858**.

At Kalpi, she joined the bigger rebel group — Rao Sahib (Nana Saheb's nephew) and Tatya Tope were already there.

From Kalpi to Gwalior

The last rebel offensive and the capture of a fortress

11. Fall of Kalpi (May 1858)

Hugh Rose did not stop. By early May 1858, he advanced toward Kalpi. The rebels fought at **Kunch (6 May 1858)** and were pushed back. They fought again to save Kalpi around **16 May**, but the British won. Kalpi slipped out of rebel hands.

12. The Bold Strike on Gwalior (1 June 1858)

Lakshmbai and Tatya Tope did not stay to get trapped. They escaped and moved fast toward **Gwalior** with their rebel force. Gwalior was not a small prize — it had a huge fort, immense prestige, and a ready military base.

On **1 June 1858**, the fight happened near **Morar cantonment**. The ruler **Maharaja Scindia** was on the British side and came out to face them. But when fighting started, a large part of Scindia's own soldiers defected to the rebels. Scindia fled with very little loyal force and took refuge at the British camp in Agra.

UPSC Note: Gwalior's Scindia, Hyderabad's Nizam, and Punjab's Sikh chiefs remained loyal to the British during 1857. This loyalty of Indian rulers is a frequently tested topic in UPSC — why some states supported the British while others revolted.

After this, the rebels captured Gwalior. For them, it felt like a new capital — a fresh centre from where the revolt could look powerful again.

The Death of Rani Lakshmibai

The final battle at Kotah-ki-Serai and the end of a legend

13. Hugh Rose Recaptures Morar (12 June 1858)

Hugh Rose followed the rebels to Gwalior. He knew that if Gwalior stayed in rebel hands, the revolt would get new life. On **12 June 1858**, he recaptured Morar cantonment near Gwalior. Pressure mounted on the rebel-held city.

14. Battle of Kotah-ki-Serai (17–18 June 1858)

Around **17–18 June 1858**, a hard cavalry fight took place near **Kotah-ki-Serai**, outside Gwalior. Rani Lakshmibai came out in the open battlefield. She was not hiding inside a palace. She was fighting like a soldier. In this fight, she was badly wounded. She did not want to be taken alive. She did not want her body to become a British trophy.

She kept fighting till the end. **Rani Lakshmibai died on 18 June 1858**. Her followers cremated her quickly so the British could not capture her body. She was approximately **29 years old** at the time of her death.

UPSC Note: Hugh Rose's famous tribute: "The Indian Mutiny has produced but one man, and that man was a woman." Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's Hindi poem "Jhansi Ki Rani" (1930) immortalised her in Indian nationalist literature.

Within the next day or two, the British took Gwalior back (around **19 June 1858**). The last big rebel stage ended here.

Tatya Tope — The Last Rebel Standing

Guerrilla warfare, betrayal, and execution

15. Guerrilla Phase (June 1858 – April 1859)

After Gwalior, Tatya Tope still did not get caught. He escaped again. From June 1858, he launched guerrilla

warfare — small attacks, sudden moves, and constant running. He covered vast distances across Central India, Rajputana, and the Deccan border, eluding multiple British columns for nearly a year.

16. Betrayal and Execution (April 1859)

In April 1859, betrayal ended the chase. Tatya Tope was betrayed by **Raja Man Singh of Narwar** and captured near the **Shivpuri/Narwar forest region**. He was tried by a British military commission. **Tatya Tope was hanged on 18 April 1859 at Shivpuri.**

With his execution, the last big organised rebel resistance faded out. The 1857 revolt, which had begun with the sepoy rising at Meerut in May 1857, effectively ended with Tatya Tope's death in April 1859 — nearly two years of fighting.

UPSC Note: The Government of India Act 1858 (passed 2 August 1858) transferred power from the East India Company to the British Crown even before the revolt fully ended. Queen Victoria's Proclamation (1 November 1858) formally announced Crown rule.

Date	Event
5 Jun 1857	Revolt erupts in Jhansi; British authority collapses
Jun 1857 – Mar 1858	Rani Lakshmibai rules Jhansi for ~10 months
19 Nov – 6 Dec 1857	Second Battle of Kanpur; Tatya Tope escapes
24 Mar 1858	Hugh Rose lays siege to Jhansi
3–4 Apr 1858	Jhansi falls; Rani escapes to Kalpi
6–16 May 1858	Battles at Kunch and Kalpi; rebels defeated
1 Jun 1858	Rebels capture Gwalior; Scindia flees
18 Jun 1858	Rani Lakshmibai dies at Kotah-ki-Serai
19 Jun 1858	British recapture Gwalior
18 Apr 1859	Tatya Tope hanged at Shivpuri

SUMMARY

Quick Revision — All Key Points

Jhansi (Jun 1857 – Apr 1858)

Revolt erupts 5 Jun 1857. Rani Lakshmibai takes charge. Rules for ~10 months. Hugh Rose sieges 24 Mar 1858. Fort stormed 3 Apr. Rani escapes to Kalpi with son Damodar Rao.

Tatya Tope's Campaign

Escapes Kanpur Jul 1857. Second Battle of Kanpur Nov-Dec 1857. Based at Kalpi. Fails to relieve Jhansi siege. Captures Gwalior with Rani. Guerrilla warfare Jun 1858 onward. Betrayed by Man Singh, hanged 18 Apr 1859 at Shivpuri.

Gwalior (Jun 1858)

Rebels capture Gwalior 1 Jun 1858. Scindia's troops defect. Hugh Rose recaptures Morar 12 Jun. Battle of Kotah-ki-Serai 17-18 Jun. Rani Lakshmibai dies 18 Jun 1858. British retake Gwalior 19 Jun.

Key UPSC Points

Doctrine of Lapse (Dalhousie) — major cause. Hugh Rose's tribute to Rani. Scindia, Nizam, Sikhs stayed loyal to British. Tatya Tope — last organised resistance. Govt of India Act 1858 passed during revolt. Queen's Proclamation 1 Nov 1858.



The Core Takeaway

She did not run away to survive. She ran away to keep the rebellion alive. She could have stayed inside Jhansi and accepted capture. But she chose the harder path — the path of dust, blood, and open battle.

She rode from Jhansi to Kalpi, from Kalpi to Gwalior, carrying the revolt on her shoulders. And when the final moment came, she did not give the British a trophy. She gave India a story that would never die.

fire without coordination. The British chose priorities — Delhi first, Lucknow second, then Central India. Superior organisation defeated dispersed courage. But Rani Lakshmibai and Tatya Tope showed that courage does not need a single capital to survive.

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Episode 7: Decline & Suppression of the Revolt

How the British crushed the rebellion, the role of loyal Indian states, and the aftermath that reshaped India.