

## AN EMPRESS OF GWALIOR STATE

**Dr. Neeraj Goel**

Asst. Prof. of History  
VRG Girls (P.G.) College  
Morar, Gwalior (M.P.)

After the demise of Mahadji Scindia in 1794, his adopted son Daulat Rao Scindia became his successor to the Gwalior state. He was neither brave nor diplomat like his father. He did not exert himself to expand or exploit the state expansion and administration earned by virtue of his ancestors. On the other hand British regime had put a lot of pre-conditions on him to make him un-influential in the state affairs and also in foreign policy.

Daulat Rao was influenced by his beautiful and diplomatic wife named Baijabai. He administered the state and family affairs with her advice. Baijabai was the only lady from the royal family, who took active part or fully involved her self in the politics with open mind and ever prepared to plan conspiracy in order to gain political mileage.

Baijabai was born in 1784 at a place called KAGALGAO in Kolhapur state. Her father Sakharam Ghatge was “DESHMUKH” of Kagalgao. He was also called the “Sargerao”, which was the ‘KHITAB’ of his family bestowed by Shahaji Bhonsale.<sup>1</sup> Sultan Yusuf Adilshah of Bijapur had given the Vatan of Kayalgao to (by the former) ancestors of Sakharam.<sup>2</sup> Baijabai was one of the most beautiful, graceful, brave clever and above all intelligent girl of Sakharam’s family. Over the years she had built confidence in tackling acute problems of family. Before her marriage, she had solved various political and economic problems faced by her family. She was also a good horse rider.

Peshwa Baji Rao of Pune was very much attracted by extraordinary beauty and cleverness of Baijabai. On the marriage proposal from Peshwa in the year 1798 at the age of 14, she was married to Daulat Rao Scindia<sup>3</sup> on the proposal of marriage from Peshwa.

After the marriage with Daulat Rao, her life had changed tremendously. She started looking after the state administration along with her husband. Daulat Rao also appreciated her political strategy. She was also consulted for her advice in the matter of royal family and state affairs<sup>4</sup> time and again. She also took proper advice from her father Sakharam and brother Hindoorao who were occupying good political post in state administration. All the three cohesively implemented their strategies and policies regarding their interest like Nurjah in Mughal regime.

Maharani Baijabai’s strategy came in to light after the death of Daulat Rao who passed away on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1827. Before his death neither he declared his successor nor had not adopted any one as his heir to the throne. There is no evidence that he ever desired to adopt a son to be his successor.<sup>5</sup> A few days before his death as he seriously fell ill and realized that his end was near, he called the Resident Major Stewart and apprized him with his last desire that after him his wife Baijabai should be allowed to rule the state as regent.<sup>6</sup> It was very clear evident that after the death of Daulat Rao all the responsibilities would be thrust upon Baijabai.

Soon after the death of Daulat Rao, a document was presented before Resident by Hindoo Rao brother of Baijabai. It was called the will of late Daulat Rao. So-called will was unsigned. According to the will Daulat Rao had declared his intention to adopt a son as the ruler of state and should be loyal to them and state.<sup>7</sup> Hindoo Rao was appointed as superintendent of the state in the so-called will. The question was not raised about the will that it was taken. But there were some doubts regarding that document. If Daulat Rao had a desire to adopt a son why did he not tell before the Resident? Why, there was no signature on it? Why, the British regime or Resident did not raise any doubt or question on it? The answer of these questions can trace only in various possibilities.

According to the wishes of Daulat Rao, Baijabai continued to act as the Regent. But still the requirement existed for the legal successor was very much intact. Infact Baijabai and Hindoo Rao wanted to decide themselves the legal successor for the state, but due to some problems they could not decide till the death of Daulat Rao. It might be the possibility that Baijabai might have in her mind to have a child adopted from her maternal family but as per the opinion of Rajpurohit, adoption should have been from her husband's family.<sup>8</sup> Thus, their expectations adversely affected. The plan of adoption of a child from her family misfired or failed.

Now, Mukut Rao, close relative of Daulat Rao, adopted as a son or successor in the year 1827. At that time, he was only 11 years old. He was declared the legal successor of Daulat Rao as well as Gwalior state and named as ALIJAH JANKOJI SCINDIA, on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1827.<sup>9</sup> Baijabai was given the charge of Regent & Hindoo Rao was declared as a minister.

The adoption of Jankoji was only an adjustment for Baijabai. She wanted to rule whole life over Gwalior state. After seven years she was forced only to act or live like Rajmata, while her dream was to rule till life. Therefore, the relationship between Baijabai and Janakoji Rao became worthless or painful. Her behaviour towards Jankoji became unpalatable. She kept the prince under restraint, excluded his name from the state seal and intrigued to remain Regent for life. Education facility could not be arranged for Jankoji Rao.<sup>10</sup> He was termed as minor and incapable. Thus, day by day the jealousy between both of them became more and more crucial and prevailed.

In April 1830 Baijabai met Resident co. Fielding and apprised him that some persons involved in instigating her son against her and were trying to create problems in state administration. So, she asked for the permission of the Resident to throw out such persons from state and captured their property under the state law.<sup>11</sup> She also asked the Resident that the transfer of power to Jankoji Rao be friezed because he was inefficient and let her exercise all the powers of government. Resident forwarded her demands to the Governor General in council but the council refused to take sides in the dispute, because till that time their policy regarding the Indian states was impartial.

On the other side Jankoji Rao was very puzzled by the harsh attitude of Baijabai and he fled from the palace to Residency. But the Resident refused to give any kind of assistance and asked him to return back.<sup>12</sup> At last G.G. Lord William Benting decided to come to Gwalior to settle the dispute. He reached Gwalior in December 1832. He advised Jankoji Rao to wait

patiently and warned Baijabai to stop the harsh attitude towards Jankoji. He also indicated that Jankoji would be supported by the British as the future ruler of Gwalior.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the conflict between them the position of state was deteriorating and unrest prevailed all over the state. In 1833, Jankoji Rao once again left the palace and reached Residency. But the new Resident Cavendish advised him to go back to the palace and warned Baijabai that once the prince was received the army support from British, he could not do anything for her.<sup>14</sup> Because at that time the policy of E.I.C. had been changed. Now E.I.C. was working on interference for its political benefit.

Cavendish could not stop the bitterness between Baijabai and Jankoji Rao. Jankoji Rao had received the support of army and some main officials of state.<sup>15</sup> British moral support was also with him. In this different and changed circumstances Baijabai left or escaped from Gwalior in 1834 and reached Dholpur and then Agra.<sup>16</sup> British officers also wanted to keep away Baijabai from Gwalior. Thus, all her efforts failed however she devoted her private fortune of over 3 crores to fomenting intrigues and attempting to overthrow the Maharaja Jankoji Rao.<sup>17</sup> (35-36)

Thus Baijabai had tried to rule over Gwalior state till life but failed, for this she also resorted to the conspiracies but not succeeded. It was a black spot on her life due to conspiracies against her son. It affected her political and administrative achievements adversely. Though, she was a good, brave, able and expert administrator.

British officers were faded up due to her shrewdness or cleverness. They tried to make her administration unstable. For this, they adopted every kind of tactics, but not succeeded. Once, the officers from Calcutta wrote Resident to grab the huge wealth of Gwalior so Gwalior could fall in economic crises. But this Baijabai was very clever; she had the intuition from very beginning. She sent her "WIWAN" to Resident and asked them that Gwalior army had not received the salary for a long time. They were ready for the revolt. If granted ten lakhs, it would be a great favour or obligation.<sup>18</sup> Thus the efforts of Britishers to grab the money were failed.

After leaving Gwalior Baijabai lived in various places as Dholpur, Agra, Farukkabad, Banaras, Nasik, Ujjain etc.<sup>19</sup> British administration continued to pose the problem for her. They captured her treasury. But she did not lose heart. After the death of Jankoji Rao at 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 1843, Tarabai adopted a minor boy aged 8 years named Bhagirath Rao (Jayaji Rao). Now Tara Bai invited her with gracefully and gave the revenue of Ujjain paragon for her expenses. While she stayed in Ujjain<sup>20</sup> she centralized herself in religious and cultural activities. Patnai Bazar of Ujjain, Sarafa bazaar and Sabji Mandi are her contribution. Her name was associated with historic places as Madan Mohan Mandir, Dwarkadish Gopal Mandir, Pishach Mochan Ghat, and Ram Ghar of Ujjain.<sup>21</sup> After some time, Tara Bai called back her to live in Gwalior.

When in 1858 mutiny broke out in Gwalior and the revolutionaries formed the new government under the leadership of Rani Laxmi Bai and Tatya Tope at that time also Baijabai had shown her courage to protect the English ladies from revolutionaries. Under her leadership all the ladies of the royal family had gone to the fort of NARWAR.<sup>22</sup> This time, Rao Sahab leader of the revolutionaries, wrote two letters inviting her to take charge of the new Government. But she was a very cunning or shrewd and diplomatic lady.<sup>23</sup> She was 74 years old and could not go on. She also knew that the Britishers could not be defeated by them and the

revolution had been suppressed all over the country. So, she decided not to take risk. She sent both the letter to Sir Robert Hamilton. Resident Major Mapherson had quoted these letters in his diary.<sup>24</sup> Thus, because of her intelligence she saved herself from the Britishers. At the age of 78 she expired in 1862.<sup>25</sup> Baijabai was an able, wise, diplomat and competent lady of her time. Her rule was firm, able and just. T. Wheeler<sup>26</sup> writes about her: “She was courageous lady. She was a woman of high spirits and during her time the affairs of Gwalior were conducted with as much efficiency as those of any other principality.” Daulat Rao told to British Resident before his death that ruler’s wife is wise and scrupulous then ruler had no need to worry about his state administration after him.<sup>27</sup> And Baijabai also proved her efficiency and ability to govern the state administration.

Baijabai issued the coins of the state with her mint mark ‘SHRI’. She issued the coins from Lashkar city mint. Gwalior Fort Mint, Burhanpur Mint, Sheopur Mint, Ujjain mint and Narwar mint.<sup>28</sup> In the year 1827, the Gwalior Fort mint issued a gold Mohar weighting 3.80 gms with Shri mint mark. She also issued silver coins of one half and quarter rupee. One paise copper coins were also issued from Gwalior fort mint with mark of ‘dagger’ and legend in Persian ‘Baijabai’.<sup>29</sup>

To conclude it may be said that Baija Bai proved herself as the Queen and Regent of Gwalior State by virtue of her wit, wisdom and ability. The decision of Daulat Rao to appoint her as the Regent was most appropriate. Baijabai got the help and support of her father and brother in her administrative duties just as Nurjahan had, but her father, being too much of a conspirator, was divested of his responsibilities. Just as Nurjahan had to give up the affairs of the state because of too much of political ambitions, the same happened with Baija Bai. She couldn’t do justice to her son Jankoji Rao too because of the same reason. Hence her name is tainted in the history. It may also be said that had there not been undue pressure of the British and had she got the support of the bureaucrats her name could have outshined in the history of Gwalior and she might have been remembered in the annals of history as does Ahilyabai Holkar.

## Reference

1. Diwakar, B.M. – Bharat Mein Company Raj ke Karname, Jaipur, 1969 P. 07
2. Ibid
3. Maheshwari, Dr. H.B. – Nu Philolx, Gwalior 1998 p. 27
4. Majupuria, Dr. Sanjay- History of Gwalior, Gwalior 1991, p. 32
5. Dwivedi, H.S. (ed.) Gwalior Darshan, Gwalior 1980 p. 232
6. ibid p. 233
7. ibid p. 234
8. ibid
9. Gwalior Gazetteer p. 40
10. Luard, C.E. Gazetteer Gwalior state, Allahabad, 1912 p. 50
11. File No. 51, Foreign pol, National Archives 16-4-1830
12. Ray, S.N.- A history of Native states of India, Vol. 1, p. 333
13. Gwalior Gazetteer p. 40
14. Foreign Polit, File No. 81, N.A. 05-12-1833
15. Dwivedi H.N.p. 238
16. Ibid
17. Luard p. 51
18. Diwakar p. 307

19. Walter, Hamintan, - The East India Gazetter, London, 1943 p. 625
20. Kanoongo, Shobha- Ujjaini ka Sanskritik Ithias, 1973 p. 260
21. Sundarlal – Bharat Mein British Raj. Allahabad, 1939 p. 239
22. Gwalior Gazetter p. 46
23. Ibid p. 38
24. Ibid
25. Luard p. 51
26. Gwalior Gazettes p. 40
27. Maheshwari p. 27
28. Ibid
29. Ibid