

Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar

Ahilyabai was born in a village namely Chondi in Maharashtra, into what is today considered a Dhangar Community. Due to her indomitable courage, valour, religious devotion, and sense of duty, she became a great ruler. Her intelligence, kindness, and sense of justice were visible from an early age.



Ahilyabai was married to Khanderao Holkar, son of the Malhar Rao Holkar in 1733 at Pune. The Holkar dynasty of Indore played a significant part of Maratha's history. The Holkar princely state was a strong link and foundation of the entire Maratha sovereignty. In the history of the Holkar dynasty, the contributions of Malhar Rao Holkar and Ahilyabai Holkar are considered important. Ahilyabai's reign is regarded as the golden chapter in the history of the Holkar dynasty.

Despite being born into a community which was then considered as lower caste community, she emerged as a symbol of women leadership in Indian history. She challenged patriarchal norms and demonstrated exceptional political and administrative capabilities. She encouraged women's participation in economic and social activities and supported widows and vulnerable groups and let's not forget her extraordinary contribution to social harmony, cultural and religious restoration.

She started her new life as the daughter-in-law of the Holkar dynasty at Indore. she used to dutifully complete all the assigned duties with precision. A lot of time, young Ahilyabai used to tag along husband Khanderao to get train under Subhedar Malhar Rao, she was intelligent and fond of learning since the start, this quality came into notice of Subhedar Malhar Rao. His trust in Ahilyabai was unbeatable, he continued training Ahilyabai alongside his son just like a son, he taught her reading, writing, horse riding, sword play, artillery, accounting as

well as administration.

At the age of 15, Ahilyabai was handed with the responsibility of the administration and accounting of the entire Holkar Daftar by the Subhedar Malhar Rao as he was at battlefield most of time. She didn't just handle the work brilliantly and with complete sincerity, the experts of the dafter were impressed by her sharp mind and grasping power.

Justice formed the foundation of Ahilyabai Holkar's administration. She personally heard public grievances and ensured impartial justice without discrimination based on caste, religion, or social status. Her court remained accessible to ordinary citizens.

After the death of her husband Khanderao, Ahilyabai was all set to perform old tradition of sati but her father-in-law dissuaded her from performing sati, she respected her father-in-law's request for the welfare of their kingdom's subjects. However, she had to endure the social stigma associated with not performing sati for the rest of her life but this act set an example for rejecting the mal-practice of sati.

After the deaths of both her father-in law Subhedar Malhar Rao and her son Malerao Holkar, Lokmata ascended the throne of Holkar dynasty, becoming the queen of Malwa.

“Ahilyadevi's legacy extends beyond governance; she was a trailblazer for women's empowerment. Rejecting the notion of women confined to domestic duties, she championed self-reliance and courage among her female subjects.” She was an educated ruler, during her reign, she introduced many transformative reforms that were considered as way ahead of her times she highly promoted welfare of all her subjects specially the women, education, secularism, the abolition of untouchability, social equality, religious unity, military training for women, the right for widows to retain property, the right for childless widows to adopt, prohibition of alcohol, anti-dowry legislation, and she actively opposed the practice of “sati” in her kingdom. She even offered support and protection to the widows, ensuring that they were not coerced to perform sati.

Lokmata Ahilyabai worked to eliminate caste discrimination and inequality, fostering unity between the high and low castes. she considered all individuals were equal there was an instance when she declared that she will marry her daughter, Muktabai to who resolves the mishaps caused by the bandits of the Bhil community who looted pilgrims traveling within her state's borders and merchants conducting trade. A young man named Yashwantrao Phanse accomplished this task. Ignoring caste considerations, Ahilyabai arranged the marriage between Yashwantrao and Muktabai and personally performed Muktabai's kanyadaan. At the time, when it was not socially acceptable for a widow, to perform any of rites, but Ahilyabai openly opposed such customs.

She used her private funds to develop a good governance which meant attending to people's everyday needs and concerns such as building wells and tanks for availability of drinking water not just within the borders of her kingdom but beyond that, paved roads for easy travel, rest houses (Dharmshalas) for pilgrims and travellers. She also rebuilt and maintained temples of many sects and supported people of different castes and backgrounds. Her efforts aimed not only at restoring the temple's structure but also at restoring its spiritual radiance and the traditions of daily worship. Her charitable work and religious donations extended beyond any single community. She made sure her territory was free from discrimination against other religions or ethnic groups. She also recognized the importance of trees and

greenery for public health and environmental well-being. She planted thousands of shade-giving and medicinal trees along roads, near wells, and around temples.

Lokmata Ahilya a queen of indomitable spirit, warrior of bravery, wisdom and compassion. Her greatness lies in her service to humanity. Her vision, ideas and thoughts related to dignity, inclusion and justice were way ahead of her time which not only openly challenged the outdated societal customs but also created cohesive surrounding.

“In essence, Ahilyadevi’s rule was a symphony of resilience, compassion, and foresight- a legacy that continues to enrich the tapestry of Indian history and inspire generations worldwide”.

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