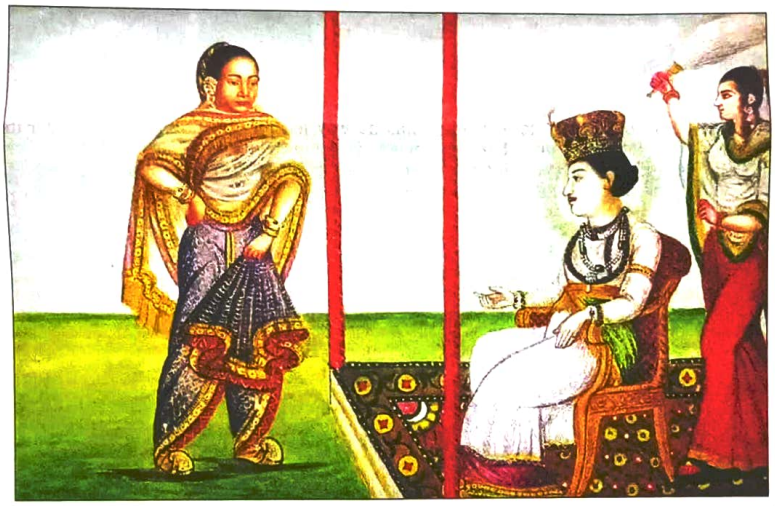
A heroine on the margins

HAZRAT MAHAL: THE REBEL BEGAM OF AWADH
By Rosie Llewellyn-Jones.
Pan Macmillan, ₹799



Wajid Ali Shah receives Hazrat Mahal, an illustration from *Ishqnama* by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah © Royal Collection Trust

The bulk of the chapters of Rosie Llewellyn-Jones's book does justice to its subtitle, taken up as they are with the occupation of Awadh during the 1857 Uprising and the heroic role that Hazrat Mahal played in fighting the British. The Uprising, also known as the First War of Independence, was a watershed moment that would change the British presence in India, with East India Company rule being subsumed under the Crown. One of the Uprising's distinguishing features was its rebel 'sheroes': Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and Hazrat Begam of Awadh (Lucknow). While the former died fighting and became a legend, the latter never got her due. This book aims to do that.

In zeroing in on Hazrat, and especially trying to establish the complexities involved in the situation she faced (one of the prime being fractured groups of soldiers), Llewellyn-Jones gives us a detailed account of the full spectrum of events — from the British annexation of Awadh under the pretext of misgovernance in 1856 and its immediate consequences, the course of the Uprising as it affected the region, the siege of Lucknow (from July to November 1857), and the final British recapture (under Sir Colin Campbell, after earlier attempts by the generals, Havelock and Outram) and victory. She analyses, comments, fills in lacunae in historical scholarship even as she quotes liberally from existing sources (including those by survivors of the siege), all with a flowing narrative and a refreshing sense of humour; ironically, though, sometimes the Begam gets somewhat lost in those details, and the reader has to remember what they are for. No such thing happens in the chapters that precede and follow the Uprising — those that focus on Hazrat's past (formative years) and the Begam's future (life after Awadh) — which make for the most engaged reading.

There is, however, a central irony in Hazrat's life: she fought with the British on behalf of her minor son, Birjis Qadr — essentially, that is, on behalf of the king, exiled and imprisoned in Calcutta, when she was already divorced. Born to a slave and a domestic servant, she entered Prince Wajid Ali Shah's Pari Mahal as a courtesan, and her life saw dramatic changes within a very short span thereafter. She rose from the ranks of a dancing girl to being one of his many 'mut'ah' wives to legitimate royal consort (after the birth of her son) and, not long after, got separated and divorced. Her post-divorce years, Llewellyn-Jones tells us, "... may have been the happiest years of her life. She had status as the mother of the king's fourth son; money coming in from her rent-free land; a pension from her former husband and staff to run her apartment and estate". Everything changed with the British occupation, and she found herself in a position where she had to take up leadership she wasn't equipped for.

The most poignant chapter of the book is "Defeat and Exile". Llewellyn-Jones emphasises that what led to the defeat "was not lack of courage on her part... but lack of resources: men, money and military leadership". And she had to manipulate her way out — first to have a safe passage out, then to enter into exile territory and, finally, to settle in and be maintained in Nepal where she fled with her son and a small retinue of servants. The negotiations were multi-layered: between her and those under her command, her and the British, and the British and the Nepali prime minister, Jung Bahadur Rana, who gave her shelter. She had to bribe her way out of Awadh and into Nepal where she lived for 20 years till her death in 1879 as all her attempts to return failed.

An interesting aspect of the narrative is the space given to the comparative situations between Hazrat Mahal and Jindan Kaur, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's last wife, who was also exiled in Nepal. It's not known whether they met in the brief overlap of their stay in 1860, but they had much in common, including being "subject to slurs on the paternity of their sons for political reasons". In Hazrat's case, that paternity was ascribed to Mammu Khan, her chief adviser and administrator of her government, who was captured by the British and sentenced to life imprisonment in Kanpur jail. There is a photo of him in the book, along with some other rare images and artworks, which adds to the appeal of the book.

Rituparna Roy

Jharkhand Social Audit Society (JSAS
(Rural Development Department, Go
2nd Floor, Town Administration Building, Dhurwa, Ra
website:www.jharkhandsau.org

(Recruitment Notification)

File No. 01/JSAS/ESTB/FTE Recruitment/2026-27/Advt. No

JSAS is an autonomous body, a society registered under the Soc under the aegis nodal ship of Rural Development Department, Go mandated for providing support to the local Gram Sabhas to accountability in implementation of, VB GRAM-G through Social Audi facilitates Social Audit Process for other schemes on request of p department. JSAS invites applications from eligible candidates for contractual positions:

A. Fixed Tenure Employees(FTEs):

Sl.	Name of Position	Location	No. of Position	A
1	Social Development Specialist	State Office	1 (UR)	F
2	Social Audit Specialist (HR & Admin)	State Office	1 (UR)	Emp
3	Social Audit Specialist (Process)	State Office	1 (UR)	JSA
4	Social Audit Specialist (Cap. Building)	State Office	1 (UR)	per
5	Social Audit Specialist (Doc. & Evaluation)	State Office	1 (UR)	Mar
		Total	05 nos.	

General Rules & Conditions:

1. The advertised positions are purely on contract basis initially for yearly Performance Appraisal and does not envisage any form of future.
2. The candidates need to send the duly filled application in the pres all the relevant credentials/certificates **ONLY** through **Registered/ Jharkhand Social Audit Society (Social Audit Unit), 2nd Floor, To Golchakkar, Dhurwa, Ranchi-834004."** clearly mentioning the "P the front side of the envelope.
3. The detailed advertisement and position related ToR can be downlo