

## AHILYABAI HOLKAR: PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

**NEWS:** Ministry of Culture Commemorates 300th Birth Anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar in Bhopal

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Madhya Pradesh is celebrating the 300th birth anniversary of Devi Ahilyabai Holkar, the Maratha queen renowned for her administrative acumen, social reform, and temple reconstruction efforts across India.

Her reign is remembered for justice, philanthropy, and architectural contributions, including rebuilding the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in 1780.

### Early Life and Background

- Devi Ahilyabai Holkar was born in 1725 in *Chaundi village*, in present-day Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra.
- She was the daughter of *Mankoji Rao Shinde*, a village head, who defied prevailing norms to ensure that Ahilyabai received an education.
- During a time when women's education and public roles were severely restricted, her upbringing laid the foundation for her progressive thinking and administrative excellence.

### Personal Life and Tragedies



- She was married to *Khanderao Holkar*, the son of *Malhar Rao Holkar*, founder of the Holkar dynasty of Indore under the Maratha Confederacy.
- Her husband died in 1754 during the *Battle of Kumbher* against the Jat ruler Suraj Mal.
- After the death of her father-in-law Malhar Rao Holkar in 1766, and her only son Malerao in 1767, Ahilyabai assumed full leadership of the Malwa kingdom.

## Assumption of Power

- In 1767, at a time when female rulers were uncommon, Ahilyabai was crowned as the ruler of the Malwa region.
- She shifted the capital of the Holkar kingdom from Indore to *Maheshwar*, a serene town on the banks of the Narmada River.
- She governed directly and was deeply involved in the day-to-day affairs of the state, setting an example of grassroots leadership.

## Military and Administrative Leadership

- Ahilyabai personally led her armies and successfully defended her kingdom from external threats.
- She appointed *Tukojirao Holkar*, a trusted military commander, as her army chief.
- Demonstrating social reform, she broke class and status barriers by marrying her daughter to *Yashwantrao*, a commoner who had proven his bravery.

## Public Welfare and Governance

- Ahilyabai was known for conducting *daily open courts* (Jan Sunvai) where she directly listened to the grievances of her subjects.
- Her reign is celebrated for peace, efficient administration, religious tolerance, and inclusive governance.
- She maintained strict discipline among officials and ensured justice and equity for her people.

## Cultural and Religious Contributions

- She was a deeply devout Hindu and a patron of temple architecture and religious institutions.
- She built and renovated *hundreds of temples, wells, ghats, dharamshalas (rest houses), and stepwells* (baolis) across India.
- Her most renowned contribution was the **reconstruction of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple** in *Varanasi* in 1780, which had been destroyed during earlier Mughal invasions.
- Other significant temples built under her patronage can be found in *Somnath, Ayodhya, Dwarka, Ujjain, and Rameswaram*.

## Economic and Industrial Contributions

- She promoted *textile and handicrafts industries*, especially in Maheshwar.
- Her efforts led to the development of the famous **Maheshwari sarees**, known for their elegance and fine weaving.

## Legacy and Death

- Ahilyabai Holkar died on *13 August 1795* at the age of 70.
- She is remembered as the '*Philosopher Queen*', a title that reflects her wisdom, spirituality, and sense of justice.
- Her reign is viewed as a golden era marked by *public welfare, prosperity, temple-building, and inclusive governance*.
- People across India revere her not only as a great ruler but also as a saint and social reformer.

## Contemporary Recognition

- Her birth anniversary is celebrated with reverence, particularly in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- The *Indore airport* is named *Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport* in her honour.
- Statues and memorials have been erected across India to commemorate her service to the nation.

Source: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2133094>