

#MYSTICAL POWER

Not Mere Reflector
But A Laser

Mayan polished obsidian mirror was
a tool that fired, not reflected, light



The Maya civilization, celebrated for its advancements in mathematics, astronomy, and artistry, created many remarkable artifacts, but one of the most mystifying and fascinating was their polished obsidian mirror. While we think of mirrors as objects that reflect light, the Maya's polished obsidian mirrors were believed to do something extraordinary: they fired light instead of simply reflecting it, a characteristic that made these mirrors powerful and enigmatic tools, with a connection to the divine and supernatural.

The Power to
Fire Light

Unlike modern mirrors, which reflect light to produce images, the Maya's polished obsidian mirrors were mystically charged objects that were thought to have the ability to focus and project light. According to the Maya's understanding of the universe, the mirror was not merely a passive reflector but an active tool that could emit light, much like a laser or an intense beam of energy.

The polished surface of the obsidian, when exposed to sunlight, could concentrate the rays, intensifying them to the point where the mirror would appear to fire light at objects, sometimes even scorching the surface of stone. This phenomenon was not simply a reflection of light, but rather the amplification of light, a concept that was deeply rooted in the Maya's spiritual and ritualistic worldview. They believed that this "firing" of light could have powerful mystical effects, including the ability to burn away the barriers between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Ritual and
Ceremonial Use

Given their mystical properties, these mirrors were most likely used in important ceremonies, such as divination, shamanistic rites, and sacrificial rituals. It was believed that the intense, focused light emitted by the mirrors could scorch stone or ignite objects, thus serving as a tool for spiritual illumination. Such a dramatic ability to manipulate



light would have made the mirrors powerful symbols of ritual authority and sacred wisdom. In some cases, it is believed that the Maya might have used the mirrors to direct light onto specific objects or offerings in their temples or ceremonial spaces. This manipulation of light could have been seen as a visual manifestation of the gods' power, perhaps, even transforming the physical world around the user, reinforcing the mirror's connection to the divine.

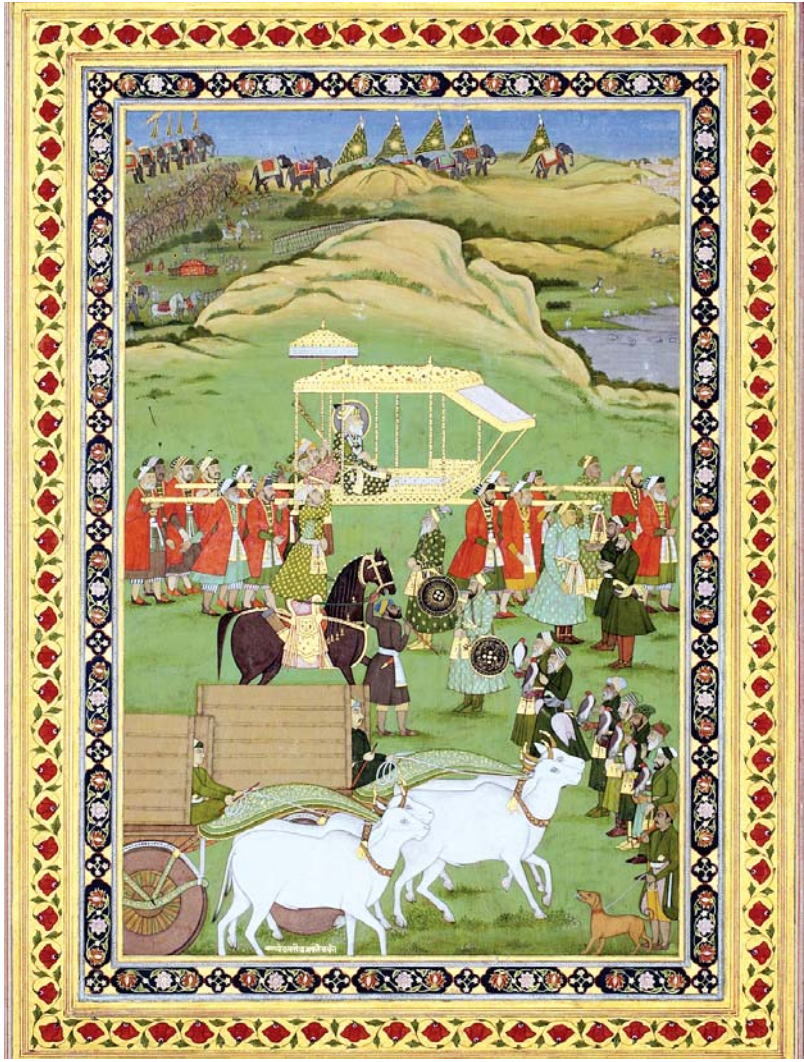
The Technology and
the Mystery

The exact method by which the Maya crafted such polished, smooth, and reflective surfaces is still a mystery to some extent. Obsidian, a natural volcanic glass, is notoriously difficult to polish to a high shine, but the Maya was adept at working with this material, creating objects that not only served functional purposes but also held profound symbolic significance. The perceived ability of these mirrors to fire light rather than merely reflect it suggests that the Maya understood the energetic properties of materials and their interaction with light in ways that were likely ahead of their time. Whether through scientific insight or mystical belief, the Maya imbued their polished obsidian mirrors with an aura of magical realism, where physical properties merged with spiritual and ritual significance.



he reign of Aurangzeb remains one of the most debated chapters in Indian history, especially when viewed alongside the fierce resistance of the Marathas in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Aurangzeb's rule marked a clear departure from the relatively accommodative policies of some earlier Mughal emperors. He emphasized Islamic orthodoxy in governance, reimposing taxes like

jizya and aligning imperial policies more closely with interpretations of Sharia. Cultural life at court changed as well, music, which had flourished under emperors like Akbar and Shah Jahan, was discouraged or removed from official patronage. Social practices such as stricter observance of purdah in elite circles also gained prominence during his reign, reflecting a broader shift towards conservatism. Yet, while Aurangzeb attempted to consolidate authority in the north, the Deccan became the empire's greatest challenge. After the death of Chhatrapati Rajaram in 1700, Aurangzeb personally intensified Mughal campaigns against the Marathas, believing their resistance might finally collapse. Instead, leadership passed to Maharani Tarabai, who proved to be a formidable strategist. At Kolhapur's central square stands



Aurangzeb Fell Repeatedly To Her

One of Tarabai's greatest strengths was that she never stopped learning, even if it was from the enemy. She mastered Aurangzeb's particular technique of bribing commanders on the enemy side. Also, following the same techniques used by the imperial army, Tarabai and her commanders began penetrating the long-held territories of the Mughal empire (as far north as Malwa and Gujarat) and appointing their own revenue collectors (kamaishdars).

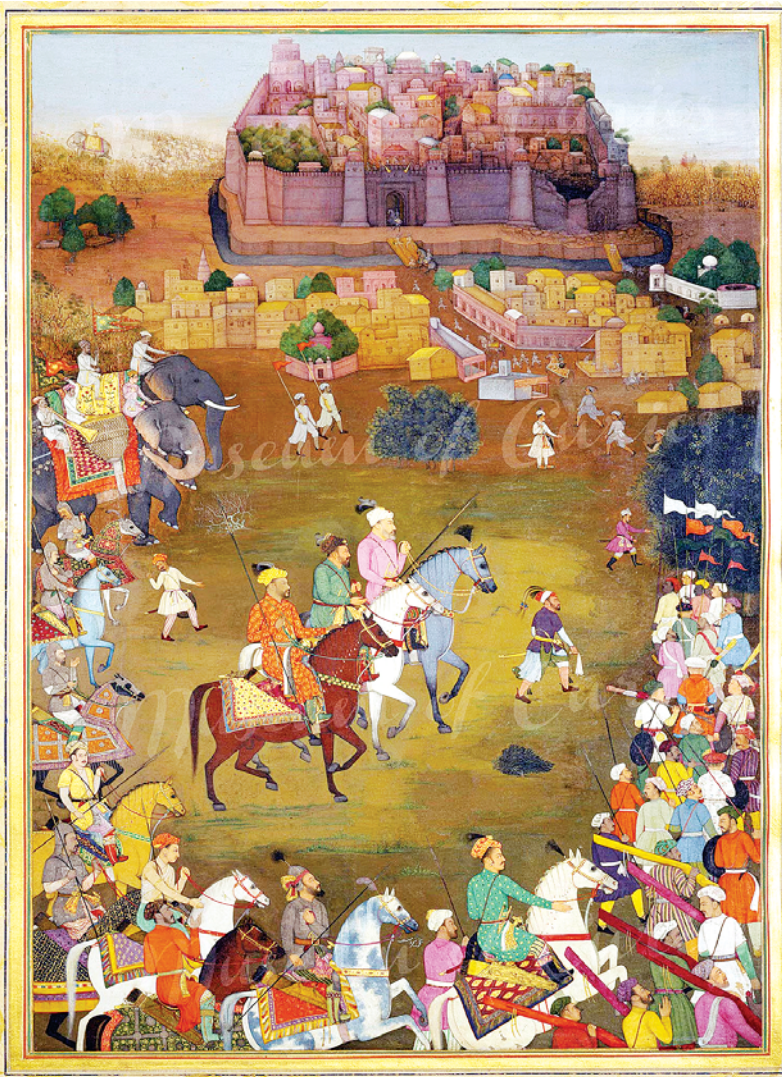
#LADY TERRIBLE

Tarabai declared herself regent and took charge of the Maratha state (Swaraj) on behalf of her young son. Far from being a passive figure, she reorganized resistance and launched aggressive campaigns. Aurangzeb reportedly underestimated her, expecting a weakened opposition, but Tarabai struck decisively...

incursions into regions like Gujarat, signaling a shift from defensive resistance to offensive expansion. One of Tarabai's greatest strengths was that she never stopped learning, even if it was from the enemy. She mastered Aurangzeb's particular technique of bribing commanders on the enemy side. Also, following the same techniques used by the imperial army, Tarabai and her commanders began penetrating the long-held territories of the Mughal empire (as far north as Malwa and Gujarat) and appointing their own revenue collectors (kamaishdars).

One of Tarabai's most looked to strategies was turning the Mughal system against itself. She adopted Aurangzeb's own method of bribing commanders, securing crucial defections that weakened the imperial forces. Thus, even when her forts of her own fell into Aurangzeb's hands, Tarabai always had control of resources from her permanent collection centres in Mughal domain!

By the final years of Aurangzeb's life, the once-mighty Mughal campaign in the Deccan had turned into a prolonged and exhausting conflict. Despite commanding one of the largest armies of his time, Aurangzeb could not decisively defeat the Marathas. When he died in 1707, the empire was territorially vast but internally strained, while the Marathas were on the rise, poised to become a dominant power in 18th-century India. Here is a couplet written for this unique woman Maratha warrior:



दिल्ली झाली दीनवाणी।
दिल्लीशाचे गेले पाणी।।
ताराबाई रामराणी।।
भद्रकाली कोपली।।
ताराबाईच्या बखले।।
दिल्लीपतीची तखले।।
खचो लागली नेचि मने।।
कुराणेडी खंडली।।
रामराणी भद्रकाली।।
रणरंगी झुड झाली।।
प्रलायाची वेड झाली।।
मुगलहो सांभाळा।।
-कवी गोविंद

In English, it can be understood as: "Delhi has become wretched. The glory and foundation of the Mughal Emperor have faded. Tarabai, the queen of Rajaram (3rd Maratha Chhatrapati), has risen like the wrathful Bhadrakali. At Tarabai's command, the throne of the Delhi Emperor trembles. The faith of the Mughals is shaken. Even the Quran (symbolizing the foundation of the Mughal Empire) seems fractured. The warrior queen, the fierce Bhadrakali, has entered the battlefield in fury. The time of destruction has arrived. Mughals, beware!" -By Govind.

An indomitable warrior queen, who was deeply devoted to her kingdom, Tarabai, didn't just prevent the Maratha Confederacy from disintegrating when it was at its lowest ebb, she also played a crucial role in it rise to national power (by 1760, the Marathas de facto controlled almost all of India).

Tarabai was the Maratha Maharani who won every single battle she fought with the armies of Aurangzeb. From 1700 to 1706, Maharani Tarabai ensured that Mughal forces couldn't ever breathe in peace. Tarabai was the second wife of Rajaram, the younger son of Shivaji. With Chhatrapati Sambhaji being executed by Aurangzeb in 1689, the reign of Maratha territories came into the hands of Rajaram. Rajaram's reign ended with his untimely death on 3rd March 1700. Tarabai declared her minor son Shivaji as Chhatrapati. Aurangzeb thought that a widow saddled with two minor children would be easy to defeat. Tarabai broke that illusion quickly. Between 1707 and the death of Aurangzeb and later, she harried the Mughal forces, pushing them out of Maratha domains.

The biggest and most memorable was the Battle of Satara in April 1700, in which the Mughal forces were decimated. Aurangzeb was personally overseeing this invasion. Eager to take Satara, he kept on pushing. Finally, the smaller Maratha forces abandoned the fort. At this point, Tarabai personally took charge of the defence of her territories. After this, there was no looking back for her.

In one of the battles in 1706, the Mughals did take Tarabai prisoner. Within four days, her troops launched a counter attack and freed her to fight for two more years. In her seven-year period as regent, Tarabai single-handedly directed the Maratha resistance against the massive army of Aurangzeb, then the mightiest ruler in the world. Muhammad Hashim (c. 1664-1732), better known by his

title Khafi Khan, was an Indo-Persian historian of Mughal India. His career began about 1693-1694 as a clerk in Bombay. He served predominantly in Gujarat and the Deccan regions, including the final decade of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. He authored the controversial and in part "patently fictitious" *Muntakhab-al Lubab*, a Persian language book about the history of India during the Mughal period, completed in 1731. It has been a much studied, contested source of information about the Mughal history, particularly Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. As this chronicler wrote:

"She won the hearts of her officers, and for all the struggles and schemes, the campaigns and sieges of Aurangzeb up to the end of his reign, the power of the Marathas increased day by day." An indomitable warrior queen, who was deeply devoted to her kingdom, Tarabai, didn't just prevent the Maratha Confederacy from disintegrating when it was at its lowest ebb, she also played a crucial role in it rise to national power (by 1760, the Marathas de facto controlled almost all of India). Under her rule, the Maratha army established their rule over Southern Karnataka and plundered several rich towns of the country's western coast (such as Burhanpur, Surat and Broach).

In the midst of repeated failures in quelling the Maratha resistance, an ageing Aurangzeb died on March 2, 1707. Facing a power vacuum at the top, the Mughals craftily released Shahu (Sambhaji's son and Tarabai's nephew) to divide the Maratha leadership by sending a new claimant to the throne. The idea succeeded when Shahu challenged Tarabai and Shivaji II for leadership of the Maratha Confederacy. Tarabai refused, fearing the impact Shahu's Mughal upbringing may have on his reign. This dispute quickly transformed into a battle. However, given Shahu's legal claim to the throne, chieftain, sent by Tarabai to fight him, started defecting to the other side. And finally in 1708, with the support of Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath's diplomacy and the new Mughal emperor's resources, he succeeded. Not one to give up easily, Tarabai established a rival court in Kolhapur the next year but was deposed after Shahu and Rajasabai (Rajaram's second wife) joined forces to put Rajasabai's son, Sambhaji II, on the Kolhapur throne.

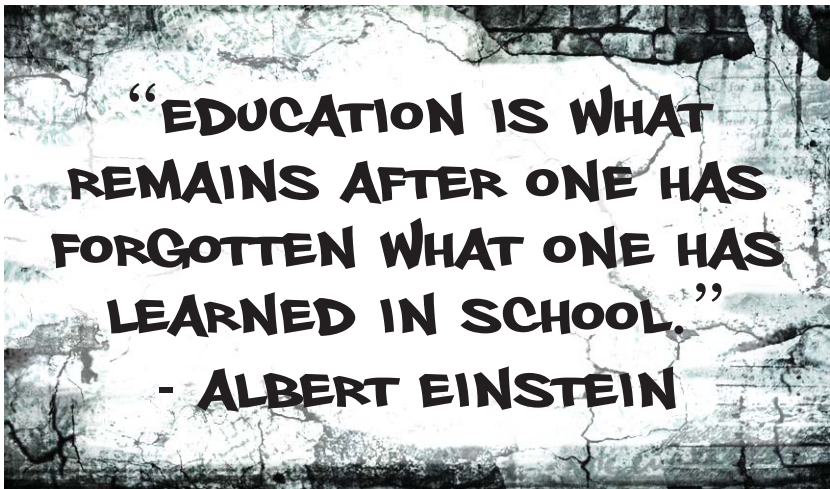
Tarabai and her son Shivaji were thrown into prison, where she spent 16 years and her son eventually died. However, later, Sambhaji turned hostile, forcing Shahu to switch sides. Finally freeing her from the prison, Shahu invited Tarabai to stay in the Satara palace, albeit under house arrest. But the former queen's role in Maratha polity was not over. At the age of 73, Tarabai stepped out of the shadows after Shahu fell seriously ill, with no direct descendants of Shivaji to appoint as his heir. She revealed that she had concealed the existence of her grandson Ramraja after her son's death, fearing his assassination by Rajasabai and Sambhaji II, and that he was now 22 years old, a Maratha prince waiting for his destiny. So, Shahu adopted Ramraja as his heir before he died in 1749. With Tarabai's help, the young prince ascended the Maratha

throne. However, later, when he became close to the powerful Peshwa, Nana Sahib, and refused to accede to her wishes, Tarabai denounced him as her grandson. Nonetheless, in 1752, Tarabai had to settle for a pact that acknowledged Nana Sahib's authority in return for the freedom to settle "into her life's final role, that of a powerful quasi-sovereign dowager." As mentioned by Eaton in his book, Tarabai breathed her last at the age of 86 in 1761, a few months after Ahmad Shah Abdali decimated the Maratha Army at the 3rd battle of Panipat. Had the indomitable queen not taken charge in 1701, it is quite likely that the Marathas would have had to face a similar defeat much earlier and the history of India would have been very different.

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THE WALL

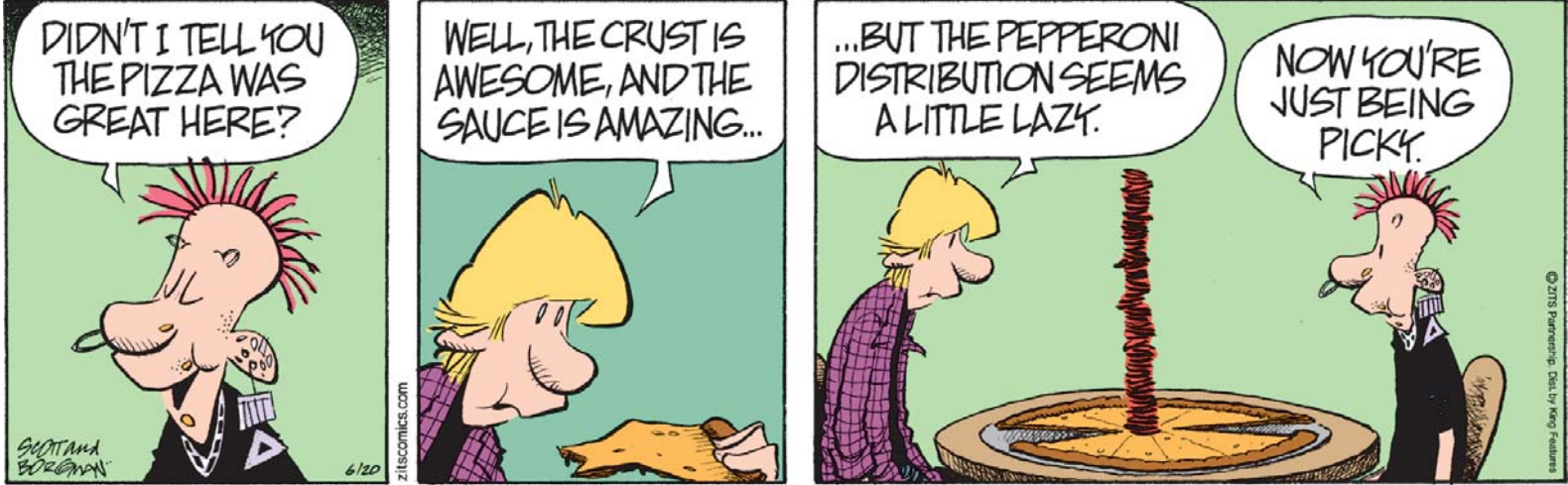


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman