

# Baji Rao I

Shrimant Peshwa Baji Rao I, also known as Bajirao Ballal was the 7th Peshwa (the modern-day equivalent of a Prime Minister) who expanded the Maratha Empire to include much of present-day India.

In a military career spanning 20 years, it is believed that he never lost a single battle during his campaigns and is widely regarded as one of the most successful generals in Indian history.

This article will give details regarding Peshwa Baji Rao I within the context of the IAS Exam

## Background of Baji Rao I

Baji Rao was born on 18 August 1700 to Balaji Vishwanath and his wife Radhabhai Barve. His siblings consisted of a younger brother Chimaji Appa and two younger sisters Anubai and Bhiubai. His father was serving as the Peshwa to Chhatrapati Shahu. Baji Rao's childhood was spent at Saswad where he was educated in Sanskrit but had a passion for military affairs at an early age.

He accompanied his father on military campaigns from an early age, even accompanying him on an expedition to Delhi in 1719. What he witnessed there convinced him that the power of the Mughal Empire was weakening and the time was ripe for a northern expansion of Maratha power towards the North. Balaji Vishwanath died in 1720 and Chhatrapati Shahu appointed 20-year old Baji Rao as Peshwa.

At the time of his appointment, the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah had given the rights to collect taxes in the erstwhile Deccan territories held by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (Born on February 19, 1630) decades earlier. Baji Rao convinced the Maratha emperor that it was time to go on an offensive as the Mughals were now at their weakest and they would collapse if the advantage was taken. Additionally, the territories under Maratha control were already being challenged by viceroys in the Deccan rulers of smaller principalities, thus it was necessary for the Marathas to assert their right over these territories

Due to his relatively young age, he faced considerable opposition from other members of the court who felt he was inexperienced and impulsive in his conduct but the young Peshwa overcame these hurdles.

## Military Campaigns of Peshwa Baji Rao I

The following table highlights the military campaigns and battles conducted by Peshwa Baji Rao I:

1. **Battle of Palkhed (1728):** The (1st) Nizam of Hyderabad Asaf Jah I refused to recognise the authority of Chhatrapati Shahu and invaded Maratha Territories to install a rival claimant to the throne.

Baji Rao defeated the Nizam at the battle of Palkhed, signing the treaty of Mungi Shevgaon in which the Nizam recognised Maratha authority and the right to collect taxes by them

2. **Malwa Campaign (1728):** Assigning a large part of his army to his younger brother Chimaji Appa, the Maratha army engaged and defeated a much larger Mughal Force led by Girdhar Bahadur and Daya Bahadur during the battle of Amjhera.

3. **Bundelkhand Campaign (1729):** Raja Chhatrasal had risen in rebellion against his Mughal overlords and established his own kingdom in Bundelkhand in 1728. He was subsequently besieged at his fort by a Mughal Army under Muhammad Khan Bangash. Raja Chhatrasal did send a request to Baji Rao for assistance but his Malwa campaign kept him busy.

Baji Rao was finally able to respond in 1729 and marched with an army of 70,000. Muhammad Khan was promptly defeated in the subsequent battle and Raja Chhatrasal was restored to his kingdom. Additionally, he granted a large

4. **Gujarat Campaign (1730-1731):** Baji Rao began to exert Maratha control in Gujarat, sending his brother Chimaji Appa for the task, but the Senapati Trimbak Rao Dabhade saw this move as Baji Rao's family exerting its influence over what he considered the Dabhade clan's sphere of influence. Trimbak Rao rebelled against Baji Rao and was joined by the Nizam of Hyderabad and Mughal Commander Muhammad Khan Bangash, who decided to take advantage of the infighting among the Marathas

All three were attacked by Balaji Rao in April 1731 and were defeated by him resulting in the death of Trimbak Rao. The dispute between the clans was resolved by Baji Rao where he proposed that Dabhade clan be allowed the right to collect taxes in Gujarat provided half the amount be deposited in Chhatrapati Shahu's treasury. Yeshwant Rao was made Senapati following the death of his father.

5. **Delhi Campaign (1736-1737):** Baji Rao I began his march on Delhi with an army of 50,000 ostensibly on the advice of the Governor of Malwa Jai Singh II. Alarmed at his advance the Mughal Emperor ordered the Nawab of Awadh, Saadat Ali Khan I to lead his army against the Marathas. Saadat Khan engaged and defeated a Maratha force under Malhar Rao Holkar, Vithoji Bule and Pilaji Jadhav, who were raiding the Doab region.

Rejoining their forces with Baji Rao, the combined army slipped through the Mughal and Awadhi by the Jat and Mewati hill route. Reaching Delhi, the Maratha forces defeated

the Mughal army during the battle of Delhi in 1737. But before his forces could consolidate his gains, the Peshwa had to withdraw because the army of Saadat Khan, numbering about 150,000 were making their way towards Delhi.

The Delhi campaign is widely regarded as the pinnacle of swift and mobile warfare which had the opponents of Bajji Rao second-guessing his every move.

6. **Battle of Bhopal (1737):** In the wake of the Delhi campaign, the Mughal Emperor requested the Nizam of Hyderabad once again for assistance. Promptly the Nizam assembled his forces and marched against the Peshwa. The Nizam was camped at Bhopal when Bajji Rao besieged his forces in 1737.

Because of the Nizam's artillery, the Marathas kept their distance and harassed their lines; no food could come in from outside, and the men and their animals were starving. The Nizam, unable to hold out any longer, signed a peace agreement at Doraha on 7 January 1738.

## Death and Legacy of Bajji Rao I

Bajji Rao caught with a virulent fever when he was encamped in Raverkhedi and died on 28 April 1740. He was cremated that day on the Narmada River. To honour his memory a chhatra was built.

Peshwa Bajji Rao is well known for his effective use of light cavalry which was the source of many of his victories. British field marshal Bernard Montgomery, a renowned commander of World War II, studied the tactics employed Bajji Rao, coming to the conclusion that the swift, mobile force who had the ability to live off the land were the critical components of his swift victories by keeping the enemy confused and deciding his own terms on how to conduct his battles.

Bajji Rao is considered as the most charismatic and dynamic leader in Indian history after Chhatrapati Shivaji. He is also considered to be one of the greatest military generals of his time.

