

Chand Bibi

Chand Bibi was a ruler and military leader from the Deccan region known for the spirited defense of her realm during the Mughal invasions of Akbar.

Chand Bibi is a featured topic in the Medieval Indian History segment of the IAS Exam. Candidates attempting the exam this year can refer to the following links to further enhance their exam preparation.

Early Life of Chand Bibi

Chand Bibi was the daughter of Hussain Nizam Shah I of Ahmednagar, and the sister of Burhan Nizam Shah II, the Sultan of Ahmednagar. She was versed in many languages, including Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Marathi and Kannada. She played the sitar and painting flowers was her hobby.

Common at the time, political alliances were sealed through marriage amongst prominent noble families. In this case, Chand Bibi was married to Ali Adil Shah I of the Bijapur Sultanate. This is where her rise to power would truly begin.

Regent of Bijapur Sultanate

At the time of her marriage, Ibrahim Adil Shah I, the father Ali Adil Shah, had divided power between the Sunni nobles, Habshis (nobles of African origin) and Deccanis. But this balance of power was threatened by Ali Adil Shah when he began to favour Shi'a nobles. Upon his death in 1580, the Shi'a nobles proclaimed Ali Adil Shah's 9-year old nephew Ibrahim Adil Shah as the ruler.

A general, Kamal Khan seized power as the regent of Ibrahim Shah, sidelining Chand Bibi as a result. Not one to merely sit on the sidelines of the throne, Chand Bibi conspired with another general, Haji Kishvar Khan, to remove Kamal Khan from power. They succeeded and Kamal Khan was executed after being caught while fleeing from Bijapur.

Informed of the conspiracy by a spy, Kishvar Khan sent troops against Mustafa Khan, who was killed in the ensuing fight.

Chand Bibi challenged Kishvar Khan, but he got her imprisoned at the Satara fort and tried to declare himself the king. However, Kishvar Khan became very unpopular among the rest of the generals. He was forced to flee when a joint army led by a Habshi general called Ikhlas Khan marched to Bijapur.

Kishvar Khan tried his luck at Ahmednagar unsuccessfully, and then fled to Golconda. He was killed in exile by a relative of Mustafa Khan. Following this, Chand Bibi acted as the regent for a short time.

Ikhlas Khan then became the regent, but he was dismissed by Chand Bibi shortly afterwards. Later, he resumed his dictatorship, which was soon challenged by the other Habshi generals. Taking advantage of the situation in Bijapur, Ahmednagar's Nizam Shahi sultan allied with the Qutb Shahi of Golconda to attack Bijapur. The troops available at Bijapur were not sufficient to repulse the joint attack.

Abu-al-Hassan, a Shi'a general appointed by Chand Bibi, called for the Maratha forces in Carnatic. The Marathas attacked the invaders' supply lines, forcing the Ahmednagar-Golconda allied army to retreat.

Ikhlas Khan then attacked Dilavar Khan to seize the control of Bijapur. However, he was defeated, and Dilavar Khan became the regent from 1582 to 1591. When order was restored in Bijapur kingdom, Chand Bibi returned to Ahmednagar.

War Against the Mughal Empire

Ahmednagar was invaded by the Mughal Empire under Prince Murad in November 1595. Chand Bibi's troops were suffering from famine. In 1596, she decided to make peace by ceding Berar to Murad, who retreated.

Chand Bibi appealed to her nephews Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur and Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of Golconda, asking them to unite against the Mughal forces. Ibrahim Adil Shah II sent a contingent of 25,000 men under Sohail Khan, which was joined by the remainder of Yekhlas Khan's force at Naldurg. Later, it was joined by a contingent of 6,000 men from Golconda.

Chand Bibi had appointed Muhammad Khan as the minister, but he proved treacherous. He made overtures to the Khan-I-Khana, offering to surrender the whole Sultanate to the Mughals. Meanwhile, Khan-I-Khana started taking possession of districts that were not included in the cession of Berar.

The Mughal forces under Khan-I-Khana and Mirza Shah Rukh left Murad's camp at Shahpur in Berar and encountered the combined forces of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, and Golconda under Sohail Khan near Sonpet (or Supa) on the banks of Godavari River. In a fierce battle on 8–9 February 1597, the Mughals won.

In spite of their victory, the Mughal forces were too weak to pursue their attack and returned to Shahpur. One of their commanders, Raja Ali Khan, was killed in the battle and there were frequent disputes between other commanders. Due to these disputes, Khan-I-Khana was recalled by Akbar in 1597. Prince Murad died shortly thereafter. Akbar then sent his son Daniyal and Khan-I-Khana with fresh troops. Akbar himself followed and encamped at Burhanpur.

Chand Bibi again defended the fort following a renewed attack from the Mughals under Daniyal Khan in 1599. However, she could not bring about an effective resistance, and decided to negotiate terms with Daniyal.

Hamid Khan, a nobleman, exaggerated and spread the false news that Chand Bibi was in treaty with the Mughals.

Chand Bibi was then killed by an enraged mob of her own troops. After her death, and a siege of four months and four days, Ahmednagar was captured by the Mughal forces of Daniyal and Mirza Yusuf Khan.



Legacy of Chand Bibi

Chand Bibi is today renowned for the defense of her realm against insurmountable odds in battle against a superior force. What is more enduring is the concept of loyalty towards one's land rather than to the ruler currently in place.

This was in response to the cutthroat nature of Deccani politics she herself fell victim too. But the ideals that she brought about would endure for centuries after her death.