

## Malik Ambar

Malik Ambar was a prime minister and general of African descent who served the Ahmadnagar Sultanate.

He is regarded as a pioneer in guerilla warfare in the region along with being credited for carrying out a revenue settlement of much of the Deccan, which formed the basis for subsequent settlements.

This article will give details about Malik Ambar within the context of the IAS Exam

### Early Life of Malik Ambar

The man who would become Malik Ambar was born in 1548 in central Ethiopia. His birth name was Chapu. His people, the Oromo were relative newcomers in the region taking advantage of an ongoing war in the region to migrate.

His childhood was typical of the Oromo people at the time - pastoralist and peaceful. 16th century Ethiopia was defined by slavery. While it impacted all communities, Solomonic Christian Kingdom and the Muslim Adal Sultanate targeted the largely spiritualist Oromo people when it came to slavery.

By 1555 over 12,000 slaves per year were captured and sold in Ethiopia. Their destinations ranged from Cairo to the heart of Persia. Sure enough, at 12 years old Chapu was captured by Arabic traders, becoming a statistic in an epidemic slave trade that spread through the regions surrounding the Indian Ocean.

The young boy was put up in an auction in a slave market in a port on the coast of Yemen. Chapu was eventually sold to a merchant named Mir Qasim who took him to Baghdad. There, Qasim gave his slave an Arabic name - Ambar. He also taught him how to read, write and manage the finances of his masters business.

After a decade in Baghdad, Mir Qasim took Ambar to India, seeking new business ventures. In 1571 both Master and Slave reached the Deccan Plateau, where the young man would go on to carve a name for himself in the years to come.

### Malik Ambar in India

The Deccan at the time was a land defined by War, intrigue and a delicate balance between its various peoples and religions. Politically the plateau was divided into five sultanates. known collectively as the Deccan Sultanates.

The rulers of this land walked along a dangerous edge where violent coups were the norm as the sultans found themselves slain at the hands of their own soldiers or by the hands of rival sultanates. To add more fuel to the proverbial fire, a new player had emerged onto the scene - the Mughal Empire.

Securing the Northern part of India, the Mughals were ready to steamroll their way into the Deccan plateau ready to take advantage of the infighting between the various sultanates.

Upon arrival in India, Ambar was sold once more. In the Deccan, Africans were known as Habshi (also known commonly as Siddhis) and were commonplace as slave soldiers and free mercenaries.

Ambar's new master was the chief minister to the Sultan of Ahmednagar - Chengiz Khan. Chengiz too was of African origin and was once enslaved, thus having much in common with Ambar. Eventually, Chengiz had earned his freedom and risen through the ranks to command armies in the name of his lord, Murtaza of the Nizam Shahi dynasty. Hence Ambar learnt that upward social mobility is possible for anyone in the Deccan, even a slave.

Beginning his service as a soldier, Ambar soon caught the attention of Chengiz for his capability and intelligence and soon enough began to groom Ambar for higher office. But it was not to be. Chengiz was executed by the sultan when jealous courtiers, who feared and distrusted his rising power, accused him of treason. But there was a silver lining for Ambar. With Chengiz's death he was now a free man and decided to make his fortune elsewhere.

## Serving the Bijapur Sultanate

Making his way towards the Bijapur Sultanate further south, he enlisted in its army. This was when he met Karima, a fellow Habshi, who would go on to become his wife. The Bijapur Sultan passed away, leaving an underage son as his heir. The responsibility of the guardians of the realm fell to the queen mother, Chand Bibi. This regent proved to be competent.

Fully aware about the cut-throat nature of Deccani politics, she introduced the concept of fidelity to the salt, where loyalty was encouraged for the land, rather than a single dynasty. Among the admirers of the the regent was Ambar himself

Ambar had risen up in the ranks of the Bijapur army, amazing a small but dedicated band of followers for his distinguished conduct in the army. For his loyalty to the regent and prowess in battle, the son of Chand Bibi bestowed upon him the honorific 'Malik' - an Arabic word for chieftain or king. But Ambar quit this service after citing insufficient support before entering service in the Nizam Shahi Army.

## War with the Mughal Empire

Malik Ambar became the regent of the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmednagar from 1607 to 1627. His tenure saw the strength of the sultanate increase. He played a crucial role in the formation of a cavalry corps about 7000 strong. By 1610, his army grew to include 50,000 which was a mix of Habshis and

Deccanis. In the following decades, Malik Ambar would fight and defeat Mughal emperor Jahangir's (Died on October 28, 1627) invasions of the deccan

Malik Ambar changed the capital from Paranda to Junnar and founded a new city, Khadki which was later on changed to Aurangabad by the Emperor Aurangzeb (Born on November 3, 1618) when he invaded Deccan around 1658 to 1707.

Ambar sought and received aid from Marath chiefs. With their help in capturing Ahemdnagar forts and towns previously occupied by the Mughals. But Malik Ambar was defeated in one of the battles by Shah Jahan and his power further decreased

### Death and Legacy of Malik Ambar

Malik Ambar died in 1626 at the age of 77. Malik Ambar had by his Siddi wife, Bibi Karima two sons; Fateh Khan and Changiz Khan and two daughters.

He founded/inhabited the city of Khirki in 1610. After his death in 1626, the name was changed to Fatehpur by his son and heir Fateh Khan. When Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor invaded Deccan in the year 1653, he made Fatehpur his capital and renamed it as Aurangabad.

Malik Ambar is especially famous for the Nahr or "Neher", the canal water supply system of the city called Khadki now known as Aurangabad. Malik Ambar completed the Neher within fifteen months. The Canal was an impressive engineering feat as it consisted of a 7 feet deep tunnel large enough for a man to walk through