

Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath

Learn his Role During Maratha Civil War & More!

Balaji Vishwanath Bhat (1662-1720) was the first hereditary Peshwas from the Bhat family who effectively took over the Maratha Empire in the 18th century. Young Maratha ruler Shahu received help from Balaji Vishwanath to strengthen his hold over a kingdom that had been plagued by civil conflict and continuous Mughal incursions under Aurangzeb. He was referred to as the second founder of the Maratha State. He was highly regarded by the king for his insightful counsel, which was one of the reasons for his rapid ascent through their ranks. **Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath** is one of the most important topics for the UPSC IAS Examination.

After reading this article, students will get to know about the life of Balaji Vishwanath, his early life, appointment, the Maratha Civil war, achievements, legacy, and death.





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Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath: Background & Early Life

- Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath was born into a Marathi Brahmin family on 1st, January 1662. His family belonged to the coastal Konkan region of modern-day Maharashtra.

- He moved to the western ghats' upper regions in quest of a job and served as a mercenary trooper for successive Maratha generals.
- Balaji Vishwanath joined the Maratha administration either during the rule of Sambhaji or the rule of his brother Rajaram.
- Later, he worked in Janjira as an accountant under Maratha general Dhanaji Jadhav.
- He held the positions of Sar Subedar of Pune from 1699 to 1702 and Sar Subedar of Daulatabad from 1704 to 1707.
- By the time Dhanaji passed away, Balaji had established himself as a reliable and competent officer.
- Balaji disagreed with Chandrasen Jadhav, Dhanaji's son, and successor, and joined forces with Shahu, the newly freed Maratha monarch. Shahu saw Balaji's skills and accepted him as his assistant.

Role of Balaji Vishwanath During Maratha Civil War

- After the death of Aurangzeb, Bahadur Shah ascended to the Mughal throne.
- The Mughal governor of the Deccan freed Shahu from captivity in an effort to keep the Marathas embroiled in a conflict between Shahu's supporters and Tarabai, the widow of Rajaram (brother of Shahu), who presided over the Marathas in the name of her son Shivaji and accused Shahu of being an impostor who had been used by the Mughals.
- To assault Shahu, Tarabai dispatched the Maratha Senapati Dhanaji Jadhav.
- Dhanaji Jadhav sent Balaji Vishwanath to meet with Shahu in secret and confirm his credentials.
- Balaji is believed to have convinced his master to back Shahu's cause.
- At Khed in the Pune District, Dhanaji and Shahu's army met. Dhanaji Jadhav proclaimed Shahu to be the legitimate heir to the Maratha crown.
- Chandrasen Jadhav, Dhanaji's son, and successor were envious of Dhanaji's confidence in Balaji Vishwanath.
- After Dhanaji Jadhav passed away in June 1708, Shahu named Chandrasen Jadhav as Senapati; however, due to their animosity for one another, Chandrasen conspired with Tarabai while looking for a way to get rid of Balaji.
- Balaji escaped to the castle of Purandar after Chandrasen attacked him due to a disagreement over the behavior of a young officer working for him.
- Balaji once more retreated to Pandavgad after Chandrasen besieged Purandar, where he dispatched a messenger to ask his ruler for assistance.
- Balaji Vishwanath was escorted to Shahu's capital Satara, where Shahu requested Chandrasen to present Balaji Vishwanath's case.
- In response, Shahu Chandrasen defied orders and joined the Tarabai cause.
- Lacking experienced generals, Shahu sought the help of Balaji Vishwanath, who agreed to assemble a new army in support of Shahu.
- Shahu gave Balaji the title of Senakarte, which means "Organizer of Maratha Armies," in appreciation for his work.
- Balaji Vishwanath conspired with the dissatisfied members of Tarabai's court to bring about Tarabai's downfall in Kolhapur in 1712.
- Rajasbai, the second widow of Rajaram, was persuaded by Balaji Vishwanath to stage a coup against Shivaji II, Tarabai's son, and put her own son Sambhaji II in power instead.
- This resulted in Shahu's protection and subjection of the Kolhapur royal family.

Balaji Vishwanath Appointment as Peshwa

- One of the first well-known individuals to support Shahu Maharaj when he was freed was Balaji Vishwanath, who did him a great service by eliminating his opponents and winning over significant individuals in Maharashtra to his cause.
- Balaji Vishwanath was promoted to a senior position in the Maratha Administration because he proved to be a very capable minister.
- The chief of the Maratha navy and the guardian of the west coast, Kanhoji Angre, was convinced to abandon his ruthless campaign against the ruler by Balaji Vishwanath through cunning means.
- On November 16, 1713, Balaji Vishwanath was promoted to the rank of Peshwa (prime minister) by Shahu Maharaj in appreciation for these contributions.

What were the Achievements of Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath?

- Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath was an outstanding statesman and competent leader.
- With the help of Balaji Vishwanath, Shahu was able to unite the Maratha Empire and subjugate numerous rival factions. Balaji was able to capitalize on Maratha's pride and aimed to forge a powerful, cohesive group.
- His most notable diplomatic successes involved the Mughal emperor, who acknowledged the Maratha claim to Chauth and sardeshmukhi on the six Deccan provinces.
- His clever way of realizing Chauth and sardeshmukhi, calculated using Todar Mal's standard assessment, through his own collectors who were stationed throughout the Mughal-controlled Deccan region, contributed to guarantee an increasing income for the Maratha state.
- Farrukhsiyar, the Mughal Emperor, rejected this pact. Then, with the aid of the Maratha, Husain Ali overthrew Farrukhsiyar.
- Balaji arranged the release of Shahu's mother, wife, and a half-brother from Mughal captivity because of his growing influence in the Mughal court.
- Balaji established the Jagirdari system in order to please the Maratha Sardars.
- Additionally, he established a cooperative committee made up of all Sardars, with Shahu serving as its Chhatrapati.
- During his reign, the Chhatrapati was reduced to a mere ceremonial head of state, and the Peshwa seized supreme power.
- In addition, he made the Peshwa title hereditary and implemented numerous financial reforms in the state.
- He is most famous for establishing the foundations of a powerful empire that would follow the Mughal Empire as the strongest kingdom in the subcontinent and for bringing peace and stability to the Maratha Empire through treaties and battles.

Legacy and Death Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath

- After securing the release of the mother (Yesubai) and wife (Savitribai) of Chhatrapati Shahuji following years in Mughal captivity, Balaji triumphantly traveled from Delhi to Satara.
- Balaji Vishwanath's health started to deteriorate as a result of his laborious travel from the imperial capital.
- On April 12, 1720, Balaji Vishwanath passed away. His son Baji Rao I succeeded him.
- Balaji Vishwanath set the groundwork for the intricate Maratha administration, which persisted for a century after his death.
- He established the framework for a powerful state that would forever alter the path of the history of the Indian subcontinent.

Conclusion

Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath was a brilliant statesman and skilled commander. He restored the Maratha Kingdom's peace and order. He also improved the state's financial condition. Without engaging in combat, he obtained Shivaji's Swaraj from the Mughals and astonished the Mughal capital with the grandeur of the Maratha forces. He was able to gain Shahu's trust and the respect of the populace at a period when the Maratha chiefs were engaged in a game of waiting and loyalty was a precious commodity.

Important MCQs on Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath

Question: Consider the following statements about Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath:

1. Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath was born into a Marathi Brahmin family on 1st, January 1662.
2. Maratha ruler Shahu appointed Balaji Vishwanath as a Peshwa on November 16, 1713.
3. After the death of Balaji Vishwanath, his son Shivaji succeeded him.

Choose the correct option from above:

- a. **1 and 2 only**
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

We hope that all your doubts regarding **Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath** will be cleared after going through this article. You can download the [Testbook App](#) now to check out various other topics relevant to the UPSC IAS Exam.