

# A Woman in Power and Leadership of South Asia

Shojin. S.<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Raichel C. Raj<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, P.G. Department of History and Research Centre,  
S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of History and Research Centre,  
Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithancode

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## Abstract

In the Sardhana province the extraordinary tale of a seemingly ordinary girl came into light from 1753. Beauty insights were acquired in a small princely state, based on heroism and diplomatic change. From her formative year changes has been observed and it make many sultans to involve her in the political field. Begum Samru, also known as Shah Begum, was a remarkable figure in North Indian history, particularly during the 18th century. She was a powerful woman who rose to prominence in a male-dominated world, demonstrating both military and political acumen. This article aimed to explore the triumphs and exploitation of a Queen, Begum Samru. Also the article foreground her life from an unbiased stand-point.

## Keywords

Military, Political, Brave, Multiple identities, Courtesan.

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## Introduction

In the late Eighteenth Century, Sardhana was marked as the golden age. The place was under the Meerut division. In the region an iconic figure, known by many names, who gave multiple identities seems to have inhabited. A Saiyyidiri young girl of Arabian extraction with personal attraction, fair complexion and charm was seen in a former courtesan named Farzana Zab-un-Nissa.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>First Author

<sup>2</sup>Corresponding Author

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### **Journey of Farzana:**

The fate over her made her to make other people dance instead of bearing herself obliged to dance for their amusement.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime her mother died at Delhi.<sup>3</sup> At that time she was fifteen and was caught in the eye of an European Merchant Walter Reinhard Sombre. At the age of twenty two she became a camp follower of a mercenary army commanded by Walter Reinhard, an Australian soldier.

He leaded the armies of various North Indian Princes. Reinhard, like most European mercenaries in India, had adopted a false name and was known to his fellow soldiers as Sombre, or Samru. Reinhard took command of a brigade of mutineers from the East India Company's army during the war between the Mughal emperor and the company (1763-1765). After surviving the disastrous Battle of Buxar by a timely retreat, he entered the service of the Jat rajah, Jawahir Singh.

In 1775, during the wars in which the Maratha-led imperialist coalition attempted to reinstate the authority of the Mughal emperor in northern India, Samru defected to the imperial camp of Shah Alam along with his highly trained infantry and artillery. Shortly afterward he was given a large body of irregular cavalry and a jagir (revenue-collection rights to be used for the support of troops) over the estate of Sardhana to the northeast of Delhi. At some time during this period, Begum Samru became first his concubine and then his wife.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, after marriage, Farzana became Begum Samru.<sup>5</sup>

### **A New Dawn:**

The Muslim girl is known to the history as Begum Samru of Sardhana. Her early life was shrouded in obscurity.<sup>6</sup> She cleverly contrived to take away from the hands of her lord the actual exercise of all his powers But this peaceful life he was not destined to enjoy long as death overtook Reinhard in 1778. The Begam therefore was requested to take command of Samru's forces by all the Europeans and natives that composed it, as the only possible mode of keeping them together. "She consented, and was regularly installed in the charge by the Emperor Shah Alam".

### **Skilled Commander:**

She thus attained the dignity and power of an independent ruling princess with an army of her own. The confidence thus reposed in her by the Emperor was not misplaced. Her soul was heroic, and the battle-field had no terror for her, as she had become accustomed to it by accompanying her husband in several of his campaigns. When she first took command of the

army, her chief military officer was a German named Pauli.<sup>7</sup> Once Begum Samru was not about to give up her rule without a fight. She managed to get Sombre's troops to support her and used her influence with Najaf Khan, her patron, to get Sardhana allotted to her. Zafaryab continued to live in luxury in Delhi, leading a life immersed in poetry and the arts, funded by Begum Samru.<sup>8</sup>

People expressed their astonishment over the military successes of this dancing girl, Farzana, a veiled woman now and bowed before her. Begum had become popular as the commander of Indian and foreign officers, and the army of soldiers. She had acquainted herself with the very instincts of her soldiers, officers and the army. She also exercised stringent discipline. The army respected her immensely. She was a fearless warrior with an unbreakable will. Begum led her army proficiently; something she had been trained to do in her childhood. Colonel Skinner, who was working in the Maratha army, had watched her lead her army in several wars.<sup>9</sup>

The British authorities began to use the services offered by Begum's army. This was because these soldiers were skilled and highly disciplined.<sup>10</sup> Thus Begum began her career as the supreme commander of about 4,000 troops with about a 100-odd Europeans, and held court in Sardhana, wearing a turban and smoking a hookah. She inexplicably converted to Catholicism in 1781 and took the name of Joanna, though she maintained Mughal dress and etiquette.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

A dancer girl who inherited the independent territory of Sardhana, and was a pioneering figure in North India. She also led the army into several battles. One of the circulating myths imagined her as a witch with a magical cloak that could destroy. She is one of a mere glimpse of the legacy of one of the most powerful women in history. However, her rule as a strong, independent woman remains one of the unique stories in the history of Indian rulers. Begum Samru, known for her political intelligence, military leadership, and cultural contributions. She navigated the complex politics of her time, establishing herself as one of the most powerful women of her era.

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